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The Mysterious Major; or, Was He Blue or Gray.

BY CORPORAL MORRIS HOYNE.

"The semi-silence of the court-room was broken by the report of a revolver!"

THE MYSTERIOUS MAJOR;

—OR.—

Was He Blue or Gray?

BY MAJOR HUGH WARREN.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE BATTLE-FIELD.

Bull Run was fought, won and lost. The Union army, after a desperate effort to advance the flag whose possession was an heirloom from the patriots of 1776 had yielded at all points and was fleeing back toward Washington with more speed than order, with the Southern army in pursuit.

Night had fallen on the battle-field, but no degree of darkness could make it otherwise than red.

There were dead men there, and there were wounded men who were nearing the end.

No pen can describe the horrors of such a scene, and it is better left to the imagination, which will certainly be dark and dismal enough.

In a little opening between tall trees, a dozen men lay scattered about as carelessly as though they were stones, uncared for and unknown.

None of them gave signs of life; their earthly troubles seemed past.

From the cover of the trees came a single man, who paused and looked at them.

Anon, he bent over and examined him closely, then, leaving him, he passed on to a second.

Both examinations were brief, and then he passed to a third.

All these fallen men were Confederates. He who stood above them wore the uniform of a Union soldier.

He looked at the third body for only a short time, and then began to remove the coat upon it.

Other garments followed, until he had the uniform complete. With these he retreated to the cover of the bushes, and with all possible haste cast off his own garments and donned those of the dead man.

He was thus transformed from a Union to a rebel soldier, so far as outward appearance went.

"That will do," he muttered, surveying himself as well as he could in the darkness. "My looks are all right now, so here goes for the next move in the game."

He had before carried a musket, but this he left behind.

Armed only with a pair of revolvers, he set his face to the west, and moved away at a brisk pace.

The bushes had not ceased to stir behind him when there was still another movement near where he had made the exchange of clothing, and a huge, gaunt form in Confederate gray arose from the ground. He had before considered himself a badly wounded man, and he was certainly a blood-stained one; but, having watched this little scene unperceived by the first man, he was suddenly gifted with new life.

"A blamed Yank who thinks he can escape by flyin' under false feathers, eh? Mebbe he will escape, but Burt Babson ain't dead yit, by a long sight, an' hyar's arter ther chap ez soon ez I get a weepon."

It was not hard to find one, and with a revolver grasped tightly in his red hand, he staggered after the unknown.

Babson was a "poor white;" an ardent hater of all men who lived north of the dividing line; and though the hand of death seemed hovering over him he had life enough left to thirst for the blood of one more enemy.

An old hunter and trailer was he, and he showed his skill as he dogged the fugitive. The latter strode away with scarcely a glance behind him, and Babson followed as fast as he could.

Only a lack of strength prevented him from at once closing in, but, as it was, his gain was a slow one, and he was often seized with pains and shivers which seemed to threaten speedy dissolution.

Despite this, he gained a little, holding to the pursuit with dogged perseverance.

Probably it would have been a vain one had not the pursued stopped under a tree and coolly and leisurely lit a cigar.

A strange occupation for a Union soldier just after the battle of Bull Run.

It seemed likely to be a fatal one, too.

Babson improved the chance and pressed forward eagerly, his eyes glittering and his revolver held ready for use.

Nearer and nearer yet.

The imperiled man stood puffing at his cigar without a thought of danger.

Babson was at last within range, and then he paused and rested his revolver against a tree; his trembling hands were not capable of otherwise holding a line even at that distance.

As it was, shooting by starlight, he did not seem likely to hit the target.

He pulled the trigger, however, and the faint report arose where the thunder of cannon had so lately been sounding.

The freshly-lighted cigar fell; the smoker threw up his arms, and then dropped like a log to the ground.

Babson laughed hoarsely.

"Hit him, by the eternal! Hurray! thar's one Yank ther less—but, mebbe he ain't dead. I'll make sure on't; I'll try ther butt o' my weepon on his head."

He staggered forward, while a sea of blood seemed floating around him and the ground to heave; he reached the unknown, and lifted his right hand—then dropped by the very side of the man he had shot, and lay without a motion.

Minutes passed, but neither stirred; they seemed as lifeless as the many who had seen Bull Run, and then closed their eyes on all the earth forever.

An hour passed.

Then one of them stirred.

He moved feebly, uncertainly, and then sat erect.

He put his hand to his head in a dazed way, and then, removing it, looked at the fresh blood stupidly.

It was the stranger; he was still alive, despite the gash along his head where the bullet had plowed.

"What has happened?" he muttered, in a vague wonder. "There were dead men, and wounded men, but I wasn't one of them, was I? No, I remember; I looked all about trying to find him, but I didn't see him, nor myself."

Who "him" was appeared very uncertain, but it was plain the speaker's mind was far from being right.

"How did all this happen?" he continued. "I am wounded, and I don't know how. I escaped, though I'm not sure he did. I hope he is dead, and then there will be no one between Glendora and me—and him, I mean—no. Hang it! what do I mean?"

When the proper time comes for an explanation, it will not be thought strange that he was somewhat at a loss to know what he meant.

Let this observation be kept in mind.

Grasping a sapling, he raised himself to his feet, though not without an effort. He was dizzy and confused, weak and miserable, and only innate courage kept him from giving way entirely.

He looked down at Burt Babson wonderingly.

"A rebel mighty close to me. Thank the Lord, he's gone off the stage forever! I wish all rebels were gone the same way."

He remained gazing at the motionless form for some time, but his mind was dazed and he failed to connect Babson with his injury, so he turned away and staggered on in his old course; but after a little time his strength increased somewhat, and he went with less effort.

When first introduced to the reader he had been on the outside of the belt of battle, and he soon passed it entirely.

There were no dead men by the way, and few marks of shot and shell.

Suddenly he paused. He had been going along without any clear idea of where he was going, but when he came upon a small house, from the window of which shone a light, he had sense enough to realize that its peaceful air was a strong contrast to what he had that day seen.

Seized with a strong desire to see a human face and rest in a human habitation, he resolved to apply for admission. He went forward and knocked at the door—once, twice, thrice, before he received an answer. Then it was opened.

A short, fat old man, with rosy cheeks and gray hair which stood erect on his head, stood before him.

They looked at each other in silence for a moment.

The Unionist—as we will call our previous acquaintance, whose name we do not know—in a stupid way, and the old man with a kind of surly displeasure.

"Well," said the latter, ungraciously, at last, "what do you want?"

The Unionist aroused.

"I am wounded and sick," he said. "In mercy's name, take me in till a little life comes back."

The old man stepped aside.

"I reckon you can come," he said, curtly.

The Unionist entered, and, passing through an entry, preceded the old man into a square room. Evidently a person who had there had been taken unawares, for he saw a glimpse of a Union flag as it was whisked out of sight, and then he saw only a startled young lady who stood, with her hands behind her.

But his brain was clear enough to read the meaning of the scene. He dropped into a chair and put out both hands quickly.

"I am in the house of loyal people!" he exclaimed. "I thank Heaven, for I am a Union soldier in disguise, wounded and fleeing from the rebels. Give me food, dress my wound and save me, or I shall die!"

He spoke in an erratic, uncertain way, but this did not seem strange for a fugitive. His face, pale where it was free from blood, and his wild eyes corroborated what he had said. The old man and the girl looked at each other, and then the former seemed reassured and came forward.

"If you are what you say, you shall have every care we can give. This may be a trap for us, but I do not hesitate to say I am for the Union, now and forever, and no loyal soldier shall go away from here uncared for."

The soldier poured forth his thanks incoherently, and though they plainly saw he was not right mentally, they set to work with a will. Food and drink were given him, and while he ate, his wound was dressed. It was an ugly-looking injury, but the old man, who had almost a professional tact, said it would soon be well if circumstances were at all favorable.

The inmates of the little house called each other "Adam" and "Barbara."

The girl was apparently twenty years of age, and a beauty. Even then the wounded man noticed it, and he followed her movements with admiring eyes.

When he had been attended to she rolled the Union flag in a second cloth and concealed it, a work in which it seemed he had before interrupted her.

Adam still looked keenly at his guest, for if he was what he seemed and not what he declared himself to be, he was harboring a dangerous person; but his doubts grew still less as time passed and the man talked.

He did not seem inclined to leave the house, but he talked of the battle and stated that he had been shot while fighting with his regiment.

This, as we already know, was not a fact, but his mental confusion still continued, and it was not strange he was at fault.

Sympathy was readily given him.

Adam and Barbara were devout Unionists, and as neither could ever hope to shoulder a musket and fight for the cause they espoused, it naturally seemed to them that the best thing they could do was to save this wearer of the blue who had been thrown into their hands by chance, and left almost as helpless as a child.

He seemed indifferent to further danger and actually fell asleep several times, arousing now and then to talk in a rambling way.

His new friends spoke of him earnestly.

"What can we do?" asked Adam. "The Union army is driven back, and those left behind will fare hard. This man ought to be got away at once."

"How can it be done?" He is not fit to walk, and we have neither horse nor wagon."

"With me for a guide, perhaps he can go by slow stages."

"And what if you encounter the Confederates?"

Adam doubled his ponderous fist.

"I'll give them a lesson if we do; I'll show them what I am made of, by George! My brother served in the Mexican war."

"That does not make you able to fight a hundred rebels."

Adam's fist relaxed.

She was the clearer headed of the two.

"Can't you go to the battlefield and find a stray horse?" she continued.

"By George! just the thing. I'll do it. Where's my hat? Do you take care of this poor fellow while I'm gone, and we'll save him yet."

"That's right," said the wounded man, arousing, "I'm a true Union man, and I want to live to help my country. Do what you can, and Colonel Messenger will help you to get a reward. He's as free as a prince, is Messenger. Go get the horse—'my kingdom for a horse.' Hurrah for the Union!"

There was no spirit in what he said, and

his heavy head drooped. Just then, however, a knock sounded at the outer door, and Adam and Barbara started and looked at each other in a startled way.

"Rebels!" whispered the old man; "I feel it in my bones, Goodness, girl, what shall we do?"

CHAPTER II.

UNWELCOME VISITORS.

Adam looked the picture of dismay, but it was Barbara who was stirred by the danger into fresh resolution.

"There's only one way," she said, with a sort of feverish courage. "Probably they only want food or drink; entertain them well, Adam; give them the best, and I'll take the wounded man to the other room and manage the best I can. Get him on his feet."

Another knock at the door made the old man spring forward.

He lifted the Unionist bodily, and then forced him to walk to the inner room.

A moment more and the door had closed, leaving him and Barbara apart from Adam.

"Hang it!" growled the wounded man, "why do you drag me off in this way?"

"Hush, hush! Other men have come, and we fear they are rebels. Be silent, as you value your life!"

"Rebels?" echoed the man, grating his teeth. "I've heard of them before, and I hate them all. Let me at them, and I'll make a few less on the roll!"

He tried to return, but she used masterly skill and quieted his reckless impulse.

"I'll do as you say, though I thirst for their blood. Rebels! I say, destruction seize all who would tear down the flag!"

"Hush, hush!"

She quieted him as she would a child, and then there was a clanking and clattering in the other room, and she listened eagerly.

"I'm Major Bredwick, of the —th South Carolina regiment," announced a loud voice. "I'm a South Carolina gentleman, sir, and these are my comrades. We want food and drink, and you'll trot out the best you've got, sir. The Southern Confederacy deserves it, sir."

"So it does," responded Adam's meeker voice, "and I'll do my best, major. We are poor people though, and——"

"Hang it! never mind the preface. Trot out the eatables. Sit down, you fellows, and take it easy."

A loud voice and a pompous one, and a large man and a conceited one.

"Bredwick," muttered the Unionist to Barbara. "I've heard of him. A scoundrel of the first water. Zounds! if I had my old strength, I'd go out; take his sword from him and run him through!"

Again the girl had to quiet him.

Adam brought food and a little wine he chanced to have, and the august major was pleased to praise it.

"Good wine—quite fair. Egad! it's a shame there's so little of it. Hello, you, Grilwild, don't make a hog of yourself, and don't set yourself up for a drinker. You ought to see my friend, Captain Bridewell, drink!"

"Bridewell!" hissed the Unionist. "Is he there? He's my worst enemy. I'll go out and kill him!"

He actually tried to pass Barbara, seeming to be wild with rage, but she overcame him with skillful words.

"Don't know where Bridewell is," resumed the loud-voiced major. "Hope he hasn't got his finish. I knew a young lady—Miss Glendora Marchmont—one of the F. F. V's, sir—who would just break her heart for him. Bridewell is a soldier all through—a soldier at Bull Run, and a soldier on Cupid's field Shoot me, if he isn't! Gentlemen, here's to Bridewell and Miss Marchmont—drink it down!"

"They shall not!" cried the Unionist. "I know them all. Bridewell is a demon, and the girl a purse proud up-start. I'll go out—I will——"

But he did not.

Somehow, the soft voice of Barbara stilled even his wildest moods, though it was plain the voice of the major was a spur to his hatred.

Barbara wondered what it was that made him so bitter toward those three—Major Bredwick, Captain Bridewell and Glendora Marchmont.

She had occasion to wonder more than ever before the mystery was revealed.

The Confederates drank, ate, swore and boasted of their late victory.

How it happened that they were there—a half dozen all told—did not appear from their talk, but if they were to be believed the defeat of the Union army was due to them, individually and collectively.

History mentions one General Beauregard as having a share in the affair, but Bredwick did not mention him.

The interpid six had done the whole work.

Bredwick had been drinking heavily before the house was reached, and Adam's wine, harmless enough ordinarily, served to put the finishing touch upon his condition.

He lost his head and his prudence, and, finally, brought his bottle down on the table with a crash.

"I'm sleepy," he declared. "Old man, get ready all your beds and we'll turn in—three beds, d'ye hear?"

Adam looked a good deal disturbed, and one of the minor officers ventured to remonstrate.

"We ought to report to the colonel, major, hadn't we?"

"Lieutentant Witzjack, mind your own businesss!" roared the major. "When I want advice I know where to look for it, and, hang me, if I ever look your way! I say we're going to bed and take it easy, and to bed we go. Why not? We've whipped the Yanks out of their boots, and now we deserve rest. Old man, plank up those beds or I'll blow your cupola off!"

The last sentence was intended to be very witty, but Adam could not see it in that light.

To furnish sleeping room for all these men would be to not only give up the quarters of the regular inmates, but expose the Unionist to their gaze.

He wondered if Barbara would be equal to the emergency, and then he remembered with dismay that the only outlet to the room where these persons were hiding was closed.

The lower half of the window had been ruined by a reckless party of soldiers two days before, and he had temporarily boarded it up tightly, while the upper half was immovable.

What chance had they to escape?

He began to talk about making quarters for the major's party, speaking in a loud voice to give Barbara warning, though he did not see how she was to profit by it.

On her own part the warning had come and she was trying to see her way clear.

It was a desperate strait, and the more she studied the less she saw for awhile, but she soon settled on what seemed the only chance.

By earnest talking she managed to make the wounded man realize the gravity of the situation, and he promised to be guided by her advice.

"There is a closet connected with this room," she explained, "and you can secrete yourself there for the time. The men are very weary with fighting and pretty well filled with liquor, and they will soon fall asleep. Then you can steal out of the room and join Adam and myself in the kitchen. But I hope that you realize that your very life, perhaps, depends on keeping perfectly quiet. Once let them suspect any one is in the closet and you are lost."

"You can depend on me," he replied, "my head's growing steadier and I see the danger. I hate this Bredwick bitterly, but as this it not the time to take my revenge, I will protect myself in order to be revenged later."

Barbara shivered a little. She could appreciate the efforts of men to save their country, but revenge, colored by personal hatred, was not to her liking.

"Whatever happens," the Unionist added, "I bless you for your noble aid in my hour of trouble. May you find as good friends if you ever need help."

"You have not yet told your name," she said, thinking that perhaps it would soon be all that was left of him.

"My name? Oh, it is Spencer, Walter Spencer. I am a native of Indiana, and—— But, never mind; this is no time for a biography. Hark! they are getting up from the table."

"Yes," said Barbara, hurriedly. "Here, enter the closet at once. The door is shrunken and you will have plenty of air. Do not fear for that. Once more, remember you must be perfectly silent."

"I will. Do not fear for me. My head is clearer, and—God bless you!"

He was in the closet; he wrung her hand at parting, and then the door closed between them.

Barbara was assailed by the gravest fears. If the Unionist's self-control left him, as it seemed liable to do when alone, there was no knowing what calamity he would bring upon himself and them.

It was bad enough to face those rough soldiers, as she must now do, under ordinary circumstances, but now her mind was in a whirl.

"I pray that all may result for the best," she thought, and then she opened the kitchen door and went out.

The Confederates were on their feet, and when Major Bredwick saw her he pulled off the hat he had worn up to this time, and made a grotesque, sweeping gesture with it.

"Egad! here is the queen of beauties. Old man, you never told me you had such an angel. Miss, your humble and admiring servant. Soldiers, bow down to her, and bow low, or, by Mars! I'll cleave your dull heads in twain."

It was absurd, but no one laughed.

Barbara herself felt like anything else. The lawless admiration of this half-drunken officer chilled her, and only her woman's wit and rare bravery enabled her to meet the danger as she should.

Adam, watching with troubled eyes, was filled with admiration at what followed.

Coolly Barbara met the crisis. She saluted Bredwick politely, asked concerning the late battle, expressed a hatred for the Union men, and with a woman's tact managed to wind the major around her finger in a very short time, without abating her dignity in the least.

Bredwick was deeply touched, and lamented that no more wine was at hand in which to drink the health of "Virginia's fairest daughter," meaning Barbara, and then declared that he would not go to bed at all; a resolution which he kept well for a while, but the liquor was working and his eyes soon refused to keep open.

He went through all the degrees of extreme sleepiness, and then had to succumb.

The room where Spencer was hiding had been set apart for the major, simply because he would sleep alone, and the Unionist's chances would be better with one man than with two.

He went in, floundered about for awhile like a seal in water, and then became silent.

Barbara and Adam, left alone in the kitchen, had been looking at each other in mute expectation. Every moment they dreaded to hear sounds which would show that Spencer had lost his self-control, attacked the Confederate and ruined all.

But the passage of time gave them fresh hope.

"He will soon be asleep," said Barbara, and then we can get the Unionist away."

"He ain't fit to go alone," said Adam.

"What else can be done?"

"Sometime," replied the old man, "we must leave our humble quarters here and go to a safer place. This fight at Bull Run has shaken me up badly, and I think the sooner we go the better. Why not to-night? Outside there are six horses. Can we do better than to get Spencer away, appropriate the whole lot, and flee North?"

It was a grave question, and the girl studied it carefully. Her heart was with the North in the great struggle taking place, and she was anxious to leave rebel land behind forever; but could they make the passage?

It seemed impossible to evade Beauregard's army, and she did not know how severely they might be dealt with if they were captured on the way.

At the same time they were not safe where they were; her life had become almost a nightmare.

So they discussed the matter seriously, and in the end it was agreed they should flee.

There was no knowing when horses could be so easily secured again, and both were anxious to help the wounded Unionist.

This point decided, Adam went out and made the horses ready, so that if an alarm was accidentally given they could mount and dash away at once.

Then he re-entered the house.

"Go, now, to Spencer," said Barbara. "Get him out of the room as carefully as possible, and—great heavens!"

It was no wonder she cried out.

From the major's room came a din of mixed sounds, in which angry words and loud bellows for help were conspicuous. Adam caught the lamp and flung open the door.

Bredwick and Spencer were struggling on the bed. The latter had secured the major's sword, and was plainly doing his best to sheathe it in its owner's body, but Bredwick had grasped his wrist and his superior strength kept the other off.

Filled with dismay, and hardly conscious of what he did, Adam rushed forward, seized Spencer and pulled him back so violently that the sword went rattling to the floor.

The Confederate uttered a roar and sprang from the bed. He was furious with anger, and there was a murderous glitter in his eye.

He stooped for the sword. If he had secured it Walter Spencer would have come to an untimely end, but that person was equally furious.

Concentrating his strength, he struck Bredwick a blow of surprising power, considering his condition, and the major went down like a log.

For a second time the sword fell with a clatter, and Spencer managed to grasp it, his blood boiling to get at his enemy, but Barbara saw that the rebel was half stunned, and she would not permit the deed.

She flung herself between them.

"No, no!" she panted. "Let him alone! You must fly, or all is lost. Oh, Adam, get him away!"

Adam rallied, and new strength seemed to be in his old arms. He actually lifted Spencer bodily and bore him from the room, followed by the girl, but here a new danger was encountered.

The Confederates had cast themselves down without undressing, and as the major's roars had aroused them from slumber two of them were already in the kitchen, and a tramping overhead showed the others would soon be at hand.

"Lost, lost!"

The words fell from Barbara's lips, but Spencer's face flushed with a battle fire. He cast off Adam's arms, and with the sword clinched in an unnaturally firm hold, leaped like a madman at the two soldiers.

The first went down before he could lift a hand in defence, and then Spencer sprang at the second.

The man was startled and amazed, but he flung up his musket mechanically and the sword snapped in two pieces over the hard barrel.

And at that moment a clatter on the stairs showed that the other men were descending.

The Unionists were in a very close corner, and Barbara again exclaimed:

"Lost, lost!"

CHAPTER III.

A WILD NIGHT FLIGHT.

Spencer's frenzied mind took note of only one thing—a rebel was before him, and he was bound to kill him if he could.

The breaking of the sword left him without a weapon, but he raised the remaining portion of the sword and hurled it with full force at the man's head.

The latter tried to dodge, but he might as well have dodged a flash of lightning.

Hit squarely in the head, he went over like a ten-pin, and then lay stunned and bleeding.

Barbara caught at Adam's arm.

"Now's the time—get him away!" she cried.

The old man aroused from his stupefaction. He caught Spencer and forced him toward the outer door, which the trio passed just as the other men entered the kitchen and stood dumfounded at the scene there visible.

The Unionist's fury had passed, and he no longer rebelled.

"The horses—where are they?" cried Barbara."

"Here!"

Adam turned the corner of the house, and there stood the animals prepared for flight.

"So we run, do we?" demanded Spencer. "Well, maybe it's best so. Here we go!"

The girl had leaped to the back of one of the animals, and he tried to follow, but it needed Adam's arm to help him up.

From the house came loud shouts in which Bredwick's roar was distinguishable, and it was clear they had no time to lose. Adam showed unexpected nerve, and in a short time all were mounted.

The old man had arranged that he should lead the three extra horses, and all went well so far.

He mounted and grasped the rope which held them together.

Just then the Confederates emerged from the house.

"Away!" exclaimed Adam, striking his own horse.

"Halt!" yelled a voice in their rear. "Halt, or we fire!"

Spencer uttered a loud and derisive shout.

"Blaze away!" he said, recklessly.

His order barely preceded its execution. Three muskets spoke irregularly, and one bullet, at least, came so near that Adam heard it whistle.

The men had not aimed so well as Burt Babson, however, and no one was hit.

The alarmed horses took a rattling pace willingly enough, and Spencer caught off his cap and waved it defiantly.

"Good-by," he shouted. "We'll meet at Richmond, next week. Death to all rebels!"

With the angry curses of the Confederates as music to cheer them on their way, the fugitives rattled down the road.

In five minutes they seemed to be safe from the men they had just left.

By taking all the horses they had drawn their fangs, as it were, and they had only to fear other men on the road.

After Spencer's derisive farewell, nothing was said by the little party for awhile. Even the wounded man was silent. Barbara, however, rapidly regained her former coolness, which was unusual for a woman, and Adam thrilled with triumph.

It was the girl who spoke first.

"Which road shall we take?" she asked.

"The west fork," replied Adam, quickly. "It is a longer way, but we ought to bear as wide of Beauregard's army as possible. It's the only chance."

"If you know the way, we'll go through all right," said Spencer. "I only wish I knew it, but the fact is my head is swimming like a top, and I don't know much of anything. Curse the man who shot me! Ah, old man, it was a glorious charge, and we went up the hill like veterans. Great charge, I tell you, but we lost many men. I fell where they lay five deep."

His head was still bothering him; that was plain; and the others looked at him anxiously and wondered how long he would be able to sit his horse.

He rode strongly enough just then, but it was an unnatural strength and might desert him at any moment.

If it did, there was no knowing what calamities would overtake them.

There was danger enough anyway. When the Union army fell back after Bull Run it was a badly demoralized combination. Theirs was a wild flight, and our friends had no means of knowing anything more about them, except that their faces were toward Washington.

They were dimly conscious that the victors had pursued, and that was all they knew of them.

Their danger was in running into this army, or scattered portions of it, and they did not know which way to turn to avoid them.

So they set their faces northwest and rode on, trusting to luck, but filled with grave fears.

All depended on Barbara and Adam. Spencer was of no use; if he advanced an idea, it was worse than useless.

His confused mind grasped at straws, and neglected what little was substantial.

The first mile was quickly covered, to make sure Bredwick and his men were off the track, and then a more moderate pace was taken, and they went forward carefully, using extreme caution.

If any soldiers were near, they wished to hear and avoid them without themselves being seen.

Spencer grew confidential as they went on; told his regiment, in one company, of which it seemed he was a lieutenant, and gave other particulars which were more or less trustworthy.

At times he talked coherently, but he was pretty sure to drop into wild speeches later.

On one point, however, he was clear; Adam and Barbara had done him a great service, and he was grateful. He expressed it, so emphatically in fact, that the girl felt her cheeks flushing, and then wondered why they should color thus.

True, Spencer was young and good-looking, but why should she blush when thanked by him any more than if he had been a grizzled veteran with a wig, false teeth and a wooden leg?

There was occasion for something more business-like before they saw the end of that ride.

What Adam had feared came to pass, for his strained ears caught a sound from up the road, which even a novice could not mistake under such circumstances. He reigned in his horses.

"Soldiers!" he said, blandly.

"I thought I heard them," said Barbara, uneasily. "Which way are they moving?"

"Heaven knows; I can't tell in this darkness," replied the old man, helplessly.

It was little wonder he felt at a loss. They had reached a point where the road cut a dense wood in two.

Overhead the branches met and shut out all light, making the place so dismal that the girl had more than once shivered.

Adam knew the wood, and he knew, too, that for a mile there was no breaks, or cross-road, nothing but that wood, which was almost a jungle.

"I think they are coming this way," said Barbara, nervously.

"They are!" interrupted Spencer. "They are horsemen advancing at a gallop. We must get out of this at once. Where shall we go?"

"We must either turn back or take to the wood."

"Turn back? Never! We must not again be taken by those rebels. Into the wood!"

"It is thick and——"

"I don't care if it's a mere hedge," said Spencer, imperiously, and, even as he spoke, he turned his horse and forced him with a smart blow on the flank to penetrate the forbidding place of darkness.

He was showing nerve, but as an unseen limb caught him across the breast he reeled and nearly fell from the saddle.

"I am weak, very weak," he muttered, "but I must not give away. Providence, give me strength to keep this brave girl out of trouble, even as she helped me."

With natural chivalry he overlooked the fact that it was still himself who was in the greatest danger.

The horses rebelled at taking the new course at first, but were finally induced to enter the tangled bushes.

So much time had been consumed in the effort, however, that the horsemen were near at hand, and they plainly saw that only one course was open to them.

If they went on, the tremendous racket they would make would betray them. They must remain perfectly quiet, and let the strangers pass.

They paused, and with only two rods of space between themselves and the road, waited with painful interest for the result. The greatest danger was that one of their horses would neigh or otherwise betray them.

Up came the horsemen with a clatter, and Barbara's heart beat tremulously.

A moment seemed sure to decide all.

But suddenly a loud, clear voice rung out from the road:

"Halt!" was the order. "Here we stand, boys. I'm not going to be chased into the Atlantic. We'll give those fellows a volley, and see how they like it."

Spencer had started, and his teeth grated ominously.

"It is Bridewell!" he hissed, "the most brutal of Secessionists. Let me at him; I'll cut him down, and then see what Glendora Marchmont will say. Let me at him!"

It may have been imagination, but Adam really thought his hair was lifting his hat from his head.

Spencer was again set wild by his mysterious hatred for Captain Bridewell, whoever he might be, and at a most unlucky time.

Barbara, however, remembered her influence over the wounded man, and she laid her hand on his arm, and spoke as persuasively as she could.

Again she succeeded well, and his clinched hand fell.

"I'll do as you say," he muttered, "but it is hard. What will Glendora say? Bridewell is her enemy, and——"

The remainder was lost in indistinct mutterings, but Barbara felt a thrill of jealousy.

Was this Glendora the lady-love of Spencer?

Nonsense! what if he was? Why should she feel jealous?

What was Spencer to her?

Sensible Barbara tried to forget her weakness.

There was another clatter from up the road, and this time louder, foretelling the approach of a second party of horsemen, and then the brave, stern voice of the leader of the first party sounded again.

"Make ready, all! Aim low, and you can't help hitting. Ha! here they come! Now—aim—fire!"

A roar rang out on the night air, and the wood took up the sound and sent it away with shivering echoes. But no one noticed what the wood did.

From the road came the sound of men

yelling and cursing, and the scream of a wounded horse, and Barbara felt wofully weak.

What a scene for a woman!

Then came a jeering laugh from those who had fired, a cheer, another order, and then they clattered away again.

This time they were not promptly pursued, but after a little delay and a good deal of angry talk, the second party got in motion.

"On, men, on! We'll capture them or die in the pursuit. On, I tell you, on."

The last words sounded dimly enough, for the men were receding and making a good deal of noise, but they were the most welcome of all.

The sky seemed to clear up a good deal. Not a word was spoken, however, until the soldiers were well out of the way, and then Barbara turned to Adam.

"Let us go at once," she said.

"Hadn't I better break cover first, and see what is there?"

It was a good place, and she said as much. He left all the horses and went to the road. No one was to be seen standing, but in the dusty track were several dark objects which looked like bowlders, but were so plainly something else that Adam shivered.

She must ride around them," he said, thinking of Barbara; but the dark object had a fascination for him and he went forward.

He expected to find dead men in blue, for Spencer had declared that he recognized the leader of the first party to be Captain Bridewell, a Confederate, and it followed that those who had pursued them ought to be Unionists, but as he bent over one of them he recognized, even in the darkness, the uniform of a Southern soldier.

But the man stirred while he looked, gasped, and spoke faintly, much to Adam's alarm, for he dreaded recognition.

"I'm a dead man. Are you much hurt?"

"No," replied Adam, awkwardly, seeing he had been mistaken for a rebel.

"The Yanks have done for me, but the boys are arter them, an' they'll git wiped out. They can't escape; every mother's son of them will be killed or captured. Oh! I'm burnin' up!"

Adam felt a thrill of horror. Dead men were about him, and here was another about to go the long road.

"I'm—I'm gone!" gasped the soldier, as though to follow Adam's own unexpressed idea; and then he dropped back and lay motionless.

The old man had had enough of war; but, actuated by a sudden impulse, he looked at the other dead men. All wore the Confederate uniform. Wandering much, he retraced his steps to where Barbara and Spencer awaited him.

They had questions to ask, but he answered few until they made the detour he had planned, and had placed those dread dark heaps behind them as they rode on westward. Then he revealed the fact that the dead men were rebels, not Unionists, greatly to Spencer's surprise.

"I am sure I recognized Bridewell's voice, and that he led the first party."

"But you see you must be mistaken. Rebels would not fire upon rebels."

Spencer's face lighted.

"Not intentionally; but I believe I see it all. There was a mistake, and rebel killed rebel instead of Unionist, as was intended. That must be it, and I only regret that Bridewell did not get his quietus."

Barbara remembered the unknown Glendora, and felt all of a woman's curiosity to know more of her.

"Captain Bridewell must have wronged you greatly," she said, hesitatingly.

"He has wronged me," said Spencer, deeply, "and he has wronged some one else, too; a lady friend of mine named Glendora Marchmont. They were once engaged lovers, but, after getting possession of her money by a lie, he deserted her. There was personal trouble between him and me, and the quarrel will some time be settled."

"Perhaps you are now Miss Marchmont's lover," said Adam, bluntly advancing the idea Barbara wished to put in words, but dared not.

"No," Spencer answered; "Glendora and I are only friends; but she is an estimable lady. Her family and mine were old neighbors and friends, and I know of Bridewell's perfidy. He is a scoundrel!"

Somehow, Barbara felt relieved at this explanation; and she redoubled her care for the wounded man. It was needed.

Now that the excitement of danger was past, he seemed on the point of collapsing, his mind soon wandered, and they were put almost to their wit's end to know how to keep him up at all.

It was a dreary ride, but Barbara again showed her decision and her influence over Spencer was something remarkable, considering the condition of his mind.

Day dawned and found them still riding forward. They had luckily passed the belt of battle and retreat, but the uniform of the Union soldier was like the red flag of a picador to a bull—blue was not a popular color in Virginia at that time.

Yet, fortune favored them, and after a series of narrow escapes which need not be here detailed, they found themselves among friends. Then Spencer gave way entirely, and, after a farewell to his new friends, he was carried away with scores of other wounded men—away to the Northern hospitals, which were destined not to be again vacant for many a day and year.

CHAPTER IV.

AN INTERESTING OCCASION.

"Major Walter Spencer!"

The colored servant announced the gentleman pompously, and with a subdued twinkle in his big eyes as he looked to where Barbara Deane sat like a queen about to receive her most valued subject. The companion seemed the more suitable when the "subject" came in, took the "queen" in his arms and kissed her passionately. Ay, he was a "favored subject."

Nearly two years have passed since the scenes before described, and they have brought many a change to the characters already introduced.

After the flight from her own home, Barbara went to live with an uncle near Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. She left little behind her. When the war formally commenced her two negro slaves had deserted her, leaving Adam Lawson her only friend. So she left only the little house and the small plot of land belonging with it.

Adam accompanied her to Gettysburg, married a servant of Mr. Waters, Barbara's uncle, and so remained near his mistress.

Our heroine thus secured a peaceful home, for her uncle was kind and well-to-do, and there seemed no danger that the tide of war would ever reach so far as her new quarters.

After leaving Spencer as before related, she heard no more of him for six weeks. Then came a letter from the hospital, saying he was improving. Other letters followed, and, finally, as in duty bound, Spencer came to see those to whom he owed so much. He was at last convalescent, and would soon be well.

Nevertheless, it was too months before he rejoined the army. When he went, Barbara was his promised wife.

During his sojourn at Mr. Water's house the young man had chanced to gain the good will of a certain general whom we, for good reasons, will know under the fictitious name of General Warfield.

The result of their acquaintance was that Spencer did not rejoin his old regiment, but went on Warfield's staff.

All this seemed very fortunate, for it enabled him, through existing circumstances, to see Barbara often, and the course of true love flowed smoothly.

Spencer still carried the work of Burt Babson's bullet on his head, and would do so to his dying day, but his mental had nearly recovered it former condition.

We say "nearly."

He seemed wholly himself except when, at times, he remembered and spoke of Captain Bridewell and Glendora Marchmont.

Then his eyes would flash with bitter hatred, and he would vow that if he ever met Bridewell he would deal severely with him,

But they did not meet, for which Barbara was rather thankful, and, it must be confessed, she was not sorry that her betrothed husband did not see Glendora.

Of this young lady no news had been received in two years.

Spencer did not even know whether she was living.

He made an excellent soldier.

As a staff officer he had risen to the rank of major, and General Warfield had a guilty feeling that if the young man was not tied to him he would be in a fair way to rank even higher.

A gallant, dashing soldier was the major, and, some one having given him the title of the "Firebrand of the Potomac," he was sometimes called "Firebrand Spencer."

But war was not the only feeling in the soldier's heart, and on this occasion when the colored man announced him with the twinkle of his eye before described, Major Spencer had visited the Pennsylvania homestead for the purpose of making Barbara his wife.

Hence, Sambo's ill-concealed mirth.

The major had represented this forthcoming event as one of importance, and Warfield was so much of the same opinion that he allowed him a three weeks' furlough, and now the gallant major was here to marry the girl he had so strangely met while the smoke of battle had hardly drifted away from Bull Run.

"I left dem togedder like a pair o' turkle doveses," Sambo explained to Adam, "an' I clar ter gracious, it made me fink ob de time I usen to court Molly Ann Desenchetroux, de esteemed waitin'-maid ob——"

"Oh, never mind that," said Adam. "I have heard all about her before. What business had you to spy on those two, you rascal?"

"Golly, dey neber objected."

"D'ye suppose they could see you when they were together? Common clay don't stand no chance with Cupid."

Sambo meditated.

"Mebby Cupid did win that fall," he said, at last, "but I reckon dat about dinner time dem lovers kin see me. I'll git a fall den, an' Cupid'll get left."

Which philosophical remark Sambo supplemented with a characteristic laugh, and then went to see about the aforesaid dinner.

But Major Spencer was back, and he and Barbara were happy.

Two days later they were to be married, and good Mrs. Waters had already taken to weeping at odd times as women do over marriages.

A ship cannot be launched without water, and few people gain the matrimonial ocean without being washed over the bar by tears, women's tears, mysterious tears, which express sorrow, joy and twelve other emotions.

Preparations for the grand event were well advanced, and when Spencer arrived on the scene matter grew even more lively.

He was greatly admired by all the women in the vicinity, for he was young and good-looking, a gallant officer, and blessed with the confidence of the great General Warfield.

Possibly some of the young ladies who came to see and admire, rather wished they could supplant Barbara, but they were too late on the scene, the young couple were devotedly attached to each other, and Spencer thought of no one but the girl he had chosen.

We pass briefly over all these preliminaries and reach the eventful day of the wedding, or rather preceding the wedding, for they were to be married in the evening.

General Warfield had unexpectedly sent a telegram saying that if such a thing was possible he would himself be present, so Sambo was sent to the railroad station to meet the 6:30 train and bring the distinguished guest over if he really came.

The train arrived, and Sambo looked eagerly to see who would get off.

No general appeared.

One woman alighted, and then the engine puffed wildly and away went the train.

No general, yet Sambo stood still as though he expected to see him spring up from some remote corner.

"Too bad!" muttered the negro. "I'd jes' liked ter hab de solemnities graced wid his presence. Golly, what's de matter wid dat woman? She's jes' a-pilin' it on ter de station agump."

Which, being interpreted, meant that the woman who had left the train was talking with the station-agent in a very excited manner, causing Sambo to wonder if she was not out of her head, but when the railroad man called to him, he went forward, willingly.

"Here, you, Sambo, here's a passenger to go over to old Waters," he explained.

"I want to go at once—at once!" said the woman, excitedly.

Sambo had caught sight of a young and handsome face, and he pulled off his hat like the well-reared Virginia gentleman of color that he was.

"Want to go to de weddin', madame?" he asked, with a true Parisian accent on the last word.

"Yes, yes," was the feverish reply. "Shall I be too late?"

"No, madame, you shall not. De solemnities will wait for de return ob de carriage, for we had s'pected Major-general Warfield to arrive, ma'am. S'pect youse a friend ob

de family, madame. Well, we'll be dar in time fur you ter enjoy de solemnities."

Sambo turned away and began to untie his horses with the deliberate dignity of a well-bred colored Virginian, but the young woman followed him, much to his surprise.

"Make haste, make haste!" she exclaimed.

Sambo felt deeply injured.

"Certainly, madame, dough dar's no danger ob missin' de solemnities. I hab assured you we will be dar when de jooful event is consummaterated."

"There is no time to lose."

Sambo began to be angry. His dignity could not stand everything.

Was he, who knew all the points of the affair, and was deeply in the confidence of the contracting parties, to allow a doubt to be cast on his judgment by a guest who, as near as he knew, was an uninvited one?

"I 'spect I is," he thought, "but it goes ag'in' de grain."

They entered the carriage and drove away at a moderate trot.

"The whip!" exclaimed the woman. "Lay on the whip!"

Sambo swelled with indignation.

"Dis horse am capable ob locomoting widout a whip," he said, stiffly. "He's got four good feets, de hoss hab."

And the fact was proven as the animal struck into a brisk trot without the aid of the whip.

"Is Walter Spencer there?" the passenger demanded.

"Major Spencer, ob de United States army, an' staff ossifer wid Gineral Warfield, is dar, madame.'

"And going to be married?"

"Yes."

"Who's that woman?"

"What woman?" asked Sambo, looking around. "I don't see no woman?"

"Fool! The one he is going to marry.'

"De young lady dat Major Spencer is about to espouse in de bounds ob patrimony is Miss Barbara Belleville Deane," was the sonorous reply.

"The miserable creature!" vehemently cried the unknown.

"Wh — wh — what?" gasped Sambo. "Who's a mis'able critter, mum?"

"That woman. Who is she—what is she—that she dares aspire to Walter Spencer's hand? I say she shall not marry him; no, not though I have to shoot her at the altar?"

Sambo gave such an impulsive bound that he nearly fell from the carriage, and though he tried to speak, his words were wholly inarticulate.

"Fool!" the woman again cried; "can you see nothing? I am not here to rejoice over that marriage, but to prevent it. Allow it to go on? Never! It shall be stopped by some means. Man, your horse is creeping."

The horse was doing very well indeed, but the strange passenger caught the whip from its socket and applied it with a few sharp cuts which made the animal bound wildly, and in a moment more they were flying madly over the road.

Sambo had been nearly paralyzed by the startling news that his passenger was going to Waters' to stop the "solemnities," but he now found it necessary to give all his attention to his legitimate work.

"Whoa, Gineral Scott!" he yelled, tugging at the reins. "Great Cicero, de hoss am runnin' away, an you did it, mum; you did, by golly!"

"Let the brute go!" was the terse reply, and down came the whip again.

Sambo's kinky wool stood on end. It was not so much the effect of fright as of the wind, but Sambo was a badly scared colored gentleman.

General Scott was going like a veritable race-horse, heedless alike of rein and his driver's voice, and the carriage spun over the road like mad.

The negro hung on to the reins in dire alarm, but the woman seemed to exult at their rapid progress.

"We'll be shipwrecked, sure!" cried the negro; and then, as though to prove the truth of his prophecy, one wheel struck a stone and both persons went flying from the vehicle, while General Scott galloped away with one-half the wagon attached to him.

The shipwreck had come.

How different was this scene from the one transpiring at Abram Waters' house! There the assembled guests made a gay and happy company, and the giddy young ladies looked like so many angels in white. A brilliant gathering; a happy one; a momentous occasion.

"Sambo is very late in returning," said Waters, looking at his watch for the twentieth time.

"It must be General Warfield has not come," said Major Spencer, disappointedly.

"That is no reason why Sambo should loiter by the way."

"Well, our friends all seem to be enjoying themselves; we can wait a little longer."

They did wait longer, but as Sambo did not appear, it soon became clear to all that they must go on without him.

That the general had come seemed impossible, and as Sambo was not essential to the grand occassion, it was agreed that the ceremony should proceed without further delay.

So the young couple took their places, and the Reverend Mr. Truhart put on his wedding expression and began the ceremony.

CHAPTER V.

THE INTEREST INCREASES.

Barbara Deane and Major Spencer made a fine looking couple; that was agreed by all, and especially by the whimpering women who were overjoyed to sadness, as women always are at weddings.

Mr. Truhart cleared his throat and commenced.

Just then there was a commotion at the rear of the crowd, and a shrill, feminine voice arose.

"Let me past; I will pass. Stand out of my way!"

A woman in a torn, dusty suit was shoving the spectators aside, and they gave way all the more readily because they judged by her wild manner that she was insane.

The women ceased weeping to shriek a little, but one practical, level-headed man seized the intruder and held her, despite her struggles.

"That'll do, mam," he said, sturdily. "You ain't wanted here, and you will please walk out with me."

"Let me alone!" she cried, passionately. "I will pass. I call on honest people to protect me—to hear me. I am come to stop this marriage and prevent a crime. Walter Spencer is my husband!"

Every one in the room heard the words, and those nearest to the major saw that he shrank back and grew very pale.

"That voice!" he muttered, hoarsely "that voice!"

But the practical man was not so easily induced to release his prisoner.

"You're mistaken—out of your head—crazy!" he exclaimed. "The major ain't no husband o' yours. Come; go away quietly and not interrupt the festivities."

"I am in my right mind, and I know what I am doing. I command you, let me pass. Would you see a crime committed? Walter Spencer is my husband. Let me pass!"

She writhed from his hold, and as the others fell back, advanced quickly to the front.

Somehow, her wild gaze first fell upon Barbara, and she laughed mockingly.

"So you are the person who would steal my husband. Ha, ha! I have sworn to prevent it, and I will! Where is the wretch who has forgotten his vows to me——"

She paused, as, turning her head, she encountered the gaze of the major.

Dead silence followed.

The major stood like a statue, but his face was still pale and dismayed, and in his eyes was an expression almost as wild as her own.

Indeed, her aspect of wildness gradually faded as she looked at him, and in its place was expressed doubt, wonder and surprise.

"Glendora!"

The word fell from the major's pale lips, and Barbara started.

She knew then who was before her; it was the Glendora Marchmont of whom Spencer had talked in his delirium following his wound, but whom he had afterward professed to regard lightly.

Once Barbara had felt jealous of Glendora. The feeling had passed, but here was the woman to forbid the union of Walter Spencer to another person.

But Glendora's face was a perfect panorama of emotions, and Walter's saw that she was in doubt.

His face brightened. It seemed as though she had made a mistake after all, and he hoped for the best.

Suddenly Glendora aroused.

"What mockery is this?" she demanded. "Why is that man here?"

Half unconsciously she had looked at the minister, and that gentleman answered with unexpected coolness:

"That gentleman, miss, is Major Walter Spencer, of the United States army, and he is here to take an estimable young lady as his wife. You claim him as your husband, and it is now your duty to prove your statements or acknowledge an error."

"Walter Spencer is my husband," Glendora quickly replied; "but yonder man is not he. Fools, has he deceived you all? He is no Unionist; he is a rank rebel, and he is an officer in the Confederate army. His name is Robert Bridewell!"

Bridewell! Barbara Deane was dazed and confused, but even then she remembered her present lover's old-time assertions of bitter hatred for Captain Bridewell, of the rebel army.

He Captain Bridewell? The idea was absurd.

She confronted Glendora, quivering with excitement and anger, a red glow in her cheeks.

"Woman, it is false!" she cried, loyally. "He is Walter Spencer, a brave Union soldier, and he is not your husband. How dare you malign him?"

Glendora looked at her almost pityingly.

"He is not my husband," she replied; "I have no desire to claim such a monster. But I solemnly swear to all here assembled that he is not Walter Spencer. He is Robert Bridewell, one of the bitterst of secessionists, a promotor of the first discord in Virginia, and now a Confederate officer."

The Reverend Mr. Truhart rubbed his head doubtfully. He would have believed that this uninvited guest was a madwoman, but he saw that the bridegroom was standing in blank dismay, which certainly did not become an innocent man. Therefore, Truhart answered practically:

"Let Major Spencer speak for himself. He is the person most interested; let him clear away the mystery."

The major started, his vague look gave place to one of manly resolution, and he advanced a step.

"Friends," he said, in a ringing voice, "I beg that none of you will believe this absurd charge. I am Walter Spencer, as I can easily prove. Have you not all known me for months? I knew Robert Bridewell once, but he was my bitter enemy, as well as the enemy of this young lady. I know her, too. She is Miss Glendora Marchmont, or was—if she is married, I certainly am not her husband. There is some grievous error; I can only believe her reason is shaken. Glendora, we were good friends once—let me speak with you seriously."

He advanced and put out one hand persuasively, but she shrank away.

"Stand back!" she cried. "Your hands are red with crime, Robert Bridewell; you shall not touch me. Neither shall you deceive nor cojole me. What! do I not know the man who was my neighbor from the time we were children? Sir," to Truhart, "I again declare that this man is Captain Bridewell, a rebel officer!"

Her former wildness had disappeared, and her cool confidence staggered those who wished to believe in the major's uprightness and patriotism.

But Truhart caught at a straw.

"Was there a resemblance between Spencer and Bridewell?" he asked.

"Not the slightest. You see this man large and dark. Walter Spencer is much lighter in weight, and his hair is a very light brown."

The spectators were staggered. Now that Glendora had recovered her calmness, she was one to command respect, and to carry an impression of truth with what she said.

She was a tall, queenly woman, and so rarely beautiful that more than one man in the room became her champion at heart, if not openly.

But the tide turned the other way when the major answered.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, persuasively, "I beg that you will not believe what this lady says. She is a lady, for I know her well; she comes of one of the best of old Virginian families; but she is now laboring under a strange hallucination. She says Walter Spencer is her husband. She is wrong, for I am Walter Spencer, and I was never married to any woman. She says I am Robert Bridewell. Again she is wrong, for Bridewell is my bitter enemy—and hers. I can only conclude that the unfortunate lady is suffering from mental aberration."

"Villain!" exclaimed Glendora.

Mr. Truhart moved forward.

"Madam, allow me to ask when you saw Walter Spencer last? I mean he whom you say is the real Spencer."

"Not since the battle of Bull Run," she replied, her dark eyes filled with tears. "He left me then and went with his regiment to fight against the rebels. He was reported killed, and I believed myself his widow until a few weeks ago when I saw his name as a staff officer of General Warfield. I investigated, and, hearing it said, he was about to be married, came here to prevent the act. I have not found him, and I now see that he really died at Bull Run, and that this man has been falsely representing himself as my lost husband, Walter Spencer."

Mr. Truhart's face suddenly brightened.

"I think I see the solution of the enigma. There are, or was, two Walter Spencers; one was your husband, the other is this gentleman, whom we all——"

"I tell you this man is Robert Bridewell, a rebel officer!" declared Glendora, "and I denounce him as a spy for the Southerners. He is playing a part which will bring ruin to the Union cause!"

She had extended one hand dramatically toward the accursed man, but the major, now wholly calm, smiled sadly.

"Poor Glendora!" he said, looking at her piteously.

Which were they to believe.

Both spoke calmly, reasonably and in a manner which bore the impress of truth; yet only one could be right. Which was it? Was the major named Walter Spencer, as he asserted, or was he really Robert Bridewell, as Glendora declared he was?

Truhart, Waters and several other middle-aged men went apart and discussed the matter. There was no doubt as to what their decision would be. They had known the accused man for two years, and known him to his credit; and he was a brave and honored officer on the staff of General Warfield.

Now, should they condemn him because an unknown woman came along and told a strange, improbable story against him?

The idea was absurd, The gentlemen unanimously agreed that though Miss Marchmont—as we will call her, though she has claimed to be Mrs. Spencer—was probably an estimable lady; she was not in her right mind and was making a false, though not a malicious, charge against their honored friend, the major.

They went back and announced their decision, greatly to Barbara's joy, and Glendora accepted it coolly.

"I have no more to say," she observed, "except to warn Miss Deane that if she marries this man she will sometime be very sorry for it. Of course I do not object to it; I am not interested in Robert Bridewell's movements, so long as he keeps his evil hands away from me. I know him to be a perjured villain, and a sympathizer with the South. I can only believe he is now a spy for the rebels, figuring in a false role. That is all I have to say."

She turned and walked from the room and from the house. No one offered to detain her, but Sambo, standing at the door with his head bound up in a bloody handkerchief, grinned delightedly as she passed him.

"Golly!" he muttered, "you shipwrecked de kerriage all for nuffin'. You's hyar, but you can't stop de weddin' solemnities—not of de court gits de proper light ob de case."

Was the wedding stopped? That now became a question. Mr. Waters, with the happiness of his niece solely in view, urged a brief delay. He said they would all be in a happier mood a few nights later. Really, he thought it best to make sure that Walter Spencer was what he claimed to be. None of them could really say that they knew him to be Warfield's staff officer, though they had never doubted that he was. A little delay would settle that point.

Barbara, however, had all of the blind faith peculiar to women. She loved the major, and believed him true and noble, and she wanted no more evidence.

But Spencer—we will continue to call him by that name—insisted upon making an explanation, and in a frank, manly way, looking his auditors fully in the face, he told this story:

The Marchmonts, Bridewells and Spencers had been old friends and neighbors in Virginia, and when Glendora's parents died, Mr. Patrick Henry Bridewell, father of Robert, had been made the young lady's guardian, and so continued until his own death.

Glendora and Robert had always been very good friends, and in the spring of 1860 it was announced that they were engaged. No cloud appeared on the sky for several months, but a storm was gathering which surprised all when it burst.

He, the narrator, Walter Spencer, had been almost like a brother to Glendora, though never a friend of Robert. In fact, they had been bitter enemies, and once had nearly fought a duel.

One day Glendora called on Walter and announced that she was a beggar Robert had invested her money and lost all; more, they had quarreled and separated forever. The girl accused her lover of having deliberately defrauded her; he replied angrily; and then she ordered him from the house.

Such was the story she told to Spencer. He took up the case with zeal, and soon satisfied himself that though Glendora's accusation had been made under a fit of passion, it had a basis of truth.

Robert had invested indirectly through one Randolph Bredwick—the Colonel Bredwick of 1863—and lost all.

Whether both were guilty, or only Bredwick, was not certain, but it looked like a deliberate plot between the two.

Spencer visited Bridewell; they quarreled hotly; the former challenged the latter; they met and fought, but Bridewell fired in the air; and, as he refused to turn his revolver on Spencer, the latter obtained only his first ineffective shot.

This ended the duel.

Bridewell left his home, and no more was heard of him for several months. The war-cloud which had been over the country burst the next spring, and as Spencer, unlike the body of Virginius, was strongly loyal, he went North and enlisted in a Union regiment.

Soon after he heard of both Bridewell and Bredwick in the Southern army; the latter he saw and tried to kill, in his frenzy, at Adam's cabin, that memorable night; the former he claimed to have heard in the woods. That was all he had seen of them, however.

Since then, Bredwick had become a colonel, though where Bridewell was he did not know.

This full, candid explanation settled whatever doubts had before existed, and those who had looked darkly at the major were very much ashamed that they had wavered in their allegiance to so noble a man.

All declared that he had fully proven his innocence, and it was agreed that the interrupted marriage should proceed. So the young couple once more took their places, and the Rev. Mr. Truhart again cleared his throat for the important event.

But just as he began there was a tramping of heavy feet, and through the crowd several stern-faced strangers unceremoniously pushed their way.

"Hold!" said one, sternly. "I reckon this affair is off. I am here to arrest this man by order of General Meade!"

CHAPTER VI.

WHO IS HE?

The strangers who thus invaded the room were five in number. Two wore uniforms, and one was plainly a captain, while the other three were in citizen's clothes; but, on the whole, they looked more ominous than the military men, for they were noticeably keen-eyed, stern-faced men, with a strong flavor of detective business about them.

Their very appearance awed the male guests, and caused the females to grow pale, and when the foremost pointed to Major Spencer and made the startling assertion with which our last chapter closed, the peaceable citizens felt as though a fragment of the sky had fallen and hit them on the head.

Following that assertion, the man in the captain's uniform stepped forward and laid his hand on Spencer's arm.

"Sir," he said, steadily, "I arrest you for treason and other high crimes, by order of General Meade, commander of the Army of the Potomac!"

Barbara gasped and fell back in her uncle's arms, but the accused man was the calmest person there.

He looked at the speaker coolly and without real anger, but with a manner half vexed, half surprised.

"Captain," he replied, "if this is a practical joke, I assure you it is not one I appreciate."

"I dare say not," was the dry reply. "Well, if you are troubled by the suspicion that it is a joke, you can set your mind at rest. We are in dead earnest, and so, I dare say, is General Meade."

Spencer scanned the faces before him a little anxiously.

"Of what am I accused?" he asked.

"Of being a spy for the rebels; of sending them information calculated to cripple and destroy the North; of high treason in general, I judge, by what I am told."

"By Heaven, there is a mistake—a plot! Tell me, men, is my accuser a woman?"

"A woman? Nonsense!" interrupted one of the stern-faced civilians. "We have been at work on your case for months, myself and other secret service officers, and we have you down fine. Don't, I beg of you, waste time by claiming to be innocent. We are not your judges. I suppose Meade will decide your case. We are here to arrest you; that's all."

Spencer's face had grown grave and troubled, but it suddenly lighted.

"Who do you think I am?" he demanded.

"You claim to be Major Walter Spencer, but——"

"I can prove by General Warfield that I am Major Spencer!" asserted the accused man.

"So you have called yourself for two years, but the truth is out at last. You have been a spy among us—the cause of many a defeat of our plans—and your real name is Robert Bridewell!"

Utter silence reigned for a while, and the wedding guests looked glum enough.

The tide had turned against the major.

These honorable men who held a warrant for the accused's arrest had repeated what Glendora Marchmont had said.

Unless all these accusers were wrong, which did not seem possible, Barbara's lover was not an honorable Union man, but really Bridewell, the traitor, and now a spy.

If he was really such a guilty wretch his presence of mind was something remarkable.

He acted the part of a misrepresented man to perfection.

Such honest indignation had not been seen for many a day, but it was not overdone.

He was a soldier; he knew he must obey the orders of his superior officers, and that obstinacy would avail him nothing; in fact, he announced that he was all ready to accompany his present accusers, and when a little more time had been given him, actually smiled and said that he could easily prove his innocence.

Barbara had recovered from her swoon, but her pale, pitiful face touched her lover, and he asked for a few minutes' conversation with her—a request which was granted.

"My dear girl," he said, "I want you to have confidence in me in this, the hour of my trial. Believe me, all will be well. General Warfield will rally to my aid, and in a few days I shall be free again. There is either a conspiracy or a terrible mistake, and as I have no enemies except those in the rebel army, I am led to believe the whole thing a mistake. Have you faith in me still?"

"I have, and I will not believe otherwise," she returned, firmly—brave girl—but her voice still had a pitiful sound. "I, at least, know you are not that terrible man, Bridewell."

"Certainly I am not, Barbara. You saw me that night after Bull Run. I went with my regiment to the battle. I was shot down—the scar is still here—in a charge, and I lay on the field sorely wounded for hours. By and by I recovered sufficiently to disguise myself and crawl to your door. You know the rest. Besides, did I not hear Bridewell's voice when we were hiding in the wood. I, Bridewell? The idea is terribly absurd. That man may be dead or alive, I don't know which, but he was a rebel, and I love the Union as well as General Meade himself."

"I feel sure you do, Walter, and I will believe in you, and trust you to the end."

She meant what she said, but while they talked Abram Walters was talking with the arresting party, to whom he explained his niece's position in regard to the mysterious major.

He said Barbara's whole love was given the man, and he feared it would kill her if Spencer was not found innocent.

The captain shook his head.

"It's a sad case, and I am sorry your niece ever met the villain, but it is my duty to tell you that there is no ground for hope. The man is not Spencer, but Robert Bridewell. He made a name the winter before the war begun by vehemently advocating secession, and had he been twenty years

older, would have been as well known as any of the rebel leaders. He entered the rebel army when the war began, and had risen to the rank of captain when he came North, where he could hurt the Union more."

"Perhaps he really changed his opinion," said Waters, catching at a straw.

"Hardly. President Lincoln and his cabinet have long known that some person in the Army of the Potomac, one who had a chance to learn valuable secrets, was betraying our cause to the rebels. Officers of all kinds were put on the track, and, after long months, their game was run down. I have it on good authority that there is not the least doubt of the major's guilt. He is a major, anyhow, though his name is Bridewell, not Spencer.'

"What will they do with him?" Waters asked, in a whisper.

The officer shrugged his shoulders.

"What is usually done with spies?" he asked.

The reply needed no interpretation.

"Alas! poor Barbara!" muttered her uncle.

We will not dwell upon the parting between the major and Barbara. It was a painful one, but she was strong in the faith that his innocence would be proven, and his own bearing was erect and firm.

Could such a man be guilty?

He looked each friend steadily in the face as he bade them good night—such was the expression he used—and then went away as though the accusation was no more than an arrest for a small debt which he declined to pay for good reasons.

Morning!

At an early hour Sambo was ordered to get a team ready, and he was soon en route to the railroad station with Barbara for a passenger.

She looked as though she had slept but little the previous night, but her air was firm and confident.

Sambo looked sulky, for he had learned that they were going to call on Glendora Marchmont, and he had not forgiven the "escapage," as he called it, of the previous night.

The best carriage was lying a wreck by the road, while they were obliged to ride in the old one, "which ain't fit for de fust famblys o' Pennsylvany, sah," he had said to Mr. Waters.

He described his ride with Glendora as he and Barbara made this new journey.

"She was jess like a ravin' lu-nat-ic," he declared, "an' de way she laid de whip onter Gineral Scott was jess a holy terror. De gineral, he laid down his ears an' streaked it like mad, but Glenroora, or whatsomever her name is, only licked him de moah, an' sung out: 'Faster! faster!' By golly, I neber seed sech a stark, starin' lunatic in my life.

"Bime by we struck de big stone. Next instant de kerriage, myself an' Glenroora was a-layin' in de ditch, while Gineral Scott, he jest run on a-draggin' de forrud wheels, his tail standin' out like a flag. I picked myself up quite shooken, I did, but dar was Glenroora on her feet, an' lookin' ez chirk ez a fly. 'Can't you ketch de hoss?' sez she.

"I give a groan.

"'Mebbe you can ketch him,' sez I.

"'No insolence.' sez she. 'Can you ketch him?'

"'Chain lightnin' couldn't ketch him,' sez I.

"'Then I'll walk,' sez she.

"An' by golly, she did walk. So did I, but she went ten laps to my five, an' got dar fust. Gineral Scott beat us all, an' when I got home he was all a-reekin'—he jest was dat. He's lame in free legs dis mornin', an' s'pect it'll take seberal bottles ob garglin' ile ter set him up ag'in."

This narrative fills the break we left in Glendora's journey, but Barbara had no idea of what he was saying.

All her thoughts were with Major Spencer. He a traitor—a spy? He guilty of any crime? The idea was preposterous. She knew him better.

"I love him, and don't believe him guilty!" she had declared to herself, time and again.

Her argument was convincing to a woman, but would it convince those grim old soldiers who would sit in judgment on the major's mysterious case.

As Barbara had hoped, she found Glendora at the hotel.

As she had not expected, she found her in tears.

The two women looked at each other in silence—Glendora, pale and sad; Barbara, indignant and vindictive. Woman-like, she blamed her so-called rival for all that had happened, and though she had come resolved to talk peacefully, the sight of her face stirred her anger.

"Why do you weep?" she abruptly demanded, as though it was a crime of which she had never been guilty.

Glendora's Southern blood fired in an instant.

"I weep for Walter Spencer, my husband, who was killed at Bull Run!" she replied.

"Walter Spencer lives, but he is not your husband," retorted Barbara, and then she took her turn at bursting into tears.

Glendora's proud face softened.

"Poor child," she said, "I pity you. Listen to me. You have come here regarding me as your enemy. I am not your enemy. The man I loved, and still love, if he is alive, you never saw; I am sure of that. Upon the man you love, I have no claim. Why should we hate each other? I feel only pity and friendship for you, and it is with the best of motives I tell you that you have been deceived. He who calls himself Walter Spencer, is, really, named Robert Bridewell. I swear it."

"There is some mistake; there must be," said poor Barbara, in a pitiful voice.

"For your sake, dear, I wish there was."

"Haven't you become confused as to their identity?"

"How could I be at fault? I have known both all my life, We were neighbors, and I saw them nearly every day. They did not look alike in the least. When they grew to manhood, Spencer was of medium height and slenderly built, with hair almost flaxen in color, and blue eyes. Bridewell was taller, stronger, heavier, with black hair and dark eyes. They were as different as black and white, and I declare that this man whom you know, is Robert Rhett Bridewell, and one of the foremost of the secessionists of 1861."

Barbara was metaphorically staggered. She had come to get consolation, but Glendora, calmly, yet pityingly, and in a voice which showed that she was telling the truth, was adding misery to misery.

"What does it mean?" murmured Miss Deane.

"You may as well accept the truth, terrible as it is for you, at once. Bridewell has passed under false colors, and, while pretending to love the Union, has been a spy for the rebels."

"I will not believe it!" said Barbara. "Has he not been a gallant Union officer? Has he not won fame and rank by personal heroism? Has he not been General Warfield's staff officer and favorite?"

"Benedict Arnold was once a favorite."

"How dare you associate Walter's name with his!" flashed Barbara, loyally.

Glendora sighed.

She had known Robert Bridewell, loved and hated him, and, believing Barbara to be his victim, she felt only pity for the unfortunate girl.

This pity she expressed so that Barbara could not doubt her sincerity, and the two parted, when the visitor went, as nominal friends.

Glendora had made no official charge against the mysterious major, and she promised that she would not. All depended on the court martial.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION.

The arrest of Major Spencer, as we shall continue to call the accused, created great excitement in military circles. Few staff officers were better known than he, and all who knew him had been favorably impressed by his bravery, frankness, cordiality and seeming loyalty.

General Warfield, in the excitement following the news of the arrest, declared that he loved him like a son. Generals Hooker, Meade and others had known and liked him.

"Where shall we look for loyal men when such as he are proved traitors?" asked Meade, as the case was laid before him.

The inquiry seemed pertinent. The major had enjoyed a great reputation for loyalty and valor. His dashing ways had gained for him the soubriquet of the "Firebrand of the Potomac."

Once, when a color sergeant was cut down at Fredericksburg and the flag seized by disloyal hands, he had dashed forward alone on his spirited horse, cut down two of the enemy, and then, as the Unionists rallied to his support, saved the colors gallantly.

"The most heroic thing I have seen since Chepultepec, by gad!" said Warfield, relating the circumstance to Hooker.

And now this man, the admired, the envied, the favored, the supposed personification of loyalty, was arrested, charged with treason of the darkest dye; charged with having come among the Union forces as a spy.

Verily, it was the wonder of the Army of the Potomac.

Just then, however, there was something else to occupy the attention of that army.

Up to this time it had never been a lucky organization.

McClellan, idolized by his soldiers, but signally unsuccessful against the rebels, had been superceded by Burnside; the latter in turn gave place to Hooker; but nothing had been done to crush the Southern power.

Hooker and Burnside had done their best against great odds, but the glory of the Army of the Potomac was yet a thing of the future.

It remained for Meade, who succeeded Hooker June 27, 1863, to win the first star in the army's crown on the bloody field of Gettysburg, that mighty struggle amid the Pennsylvania mountains.

Gettysburg had not been fought when Spencer was arrested, but the shadow of the great rebel invasion was over the land. The Union troops had been worsted at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville; they had fallen back toward Washington: and Lee was about to pour his elated army into the loyal states.

At this crisis there was something to be thought about besides Spencer, as the sequel will show.

As the Union army was literally "on the wing," Spencer was at first consigned to an ordinary jail, until such time as his case could be attended to. Under Meade there served one John P. Hill, a captain in a loyal regiment, who had for months been Spencer's fast friend.

At an early hour the forenoon after the arrest, the prison door unclosed and admitted this officer, and in a moment more the two were shaking hands warmly. It was Spencer who was the cooler, and he looked into his friend's face with an undisturbed smile.

"This is kind of you, Jack," he said, frankly. "Being shut up in jail is no joke, and you will help pass the time until I am released. We'll have in a chess set and make a day of it, eh?"

He spoke like one whose mind was entirely free from care, doubt and trouble, but Hill could not reciprocate.

"You'd better be looking out for yourself, rather than an imaginary king, Walt," he replied.

"How so?"

"How so? Why, what else should you do when you are arrested as a spy?"

Spencer smiled good-humoredly.

"Bless your soul, don't let this worry you in the least; Warfield will make it all right."

"You forgot that Hooker and Meade have the lead."

"Why, confound it, Jack, you talk like an undertaker. Don't you see that it is all a mistake, which will be cleared up in the twinkling of an eye."

"But they claim that they have treasonable letters in your own handwriting, betraying the plans of our leaders and the strength of our army, and——"

"Oh! that's all nonsense. Rumor is always wide of the mark. I never wrote any such letters, so, of course, there are none in existence. Jack, you don't think I'm a traitor, I hope?"

"God forbid! Walt, you know I don't. What I fear is that there is a plot against you."

"I haven't an enemy in the world."

"What of official jealousy? Is there no one who would stoop to even this villainy to supplant you?"

Spencer meditated more gravely. Lighthearted as he naturally was, he had too much sense to shut his eyes to real logic, and though he still maintained the opinion that his arrest was a mere mistake, he considered the possibility that a plot was at work against him.

General Meade, to whom the whole case had been referred, would, considering the momentous crisis threatening the nation, have sent the prisoner to Washington until after Lee had been disposed of, but General Warfield had stoutly taken up the cudgel for his favorite, and asserted that Spencer

would easily clear himself, and thus it was that Meade had agreed to devote a few minutes to preliminary examination.

If there was no adverse evidence Spencer would be released, if the accusers could prove what they asserted he would be held for formal trial.

It was clear, however, that Meade was merely obliging Warfield.

The former had seen much of the evidence before he granted leave to arrest Spencer, and it was his melancholy belief that the major would be proven a spy and executed as one.

Jack Hill explained all of this, excepting, of course, Meade's opinion, which was known only to himself, and urged upon the prisoner the necessity of protecting himself against the serious charge brought against him.

He was brought out for the examination at eleven o'clock.

Warfield shook him by the hand and then sat down beside him, while Hill took the other side, and the inquiry began.

The first witness was one of the keen-faced civilians who arrested Spencer at his wedding hour.

This man was a detective in the employ of the government.

He told how the authorities at Washington had long had reason to believe that some one connected with the Army of the Potomac was betraying the plans, strength and proposed movements of that organization to the enemy, and how he had undertaken to learn who the guilty party was.

Had the detective been frank he would have admitted what every one knew, that there was a horde of traitors and spies all along the hostile line, but this was not to his advantage.

He gave the history of his investigation at some length.

It need not be detailed here.

He and his associates finally became suspicious of Spencer, and then a certain paper, which he had marked "A," fell into his hands.

He shadowed Spencer still closer, and one night captured a suspicious looking fellow who had just left the major.

On his person was found a second paper which the detective had marked "B."

These two papers were then submitted to the informal court.

Document "A" was a letter bearing date of March 1, 1863, the night before Hooker's advance at Chancellorsville.

It gave many details of Hooker's plans as they then existed.

The letter was signed "Robert Rhett Bridewell."

Document "B" bore date of June 2.

It gave many facts concerning the Union army, and was signed like the previous letter.

Both were addressed to General Robert E. Lee.

"With this evidence in hand," proceeded the detective, "we went further. Luckily, I remembered that this Bridewell had been a violent secessionist in the winter of 1860-1, and had afterward entered the rebel army. I began to search for a man who had then known Bridewell. After several days I found the proper person in Colonel Telyrand. He took him to see the so-called Major Spencer, and he at once recognized him as Robert R. Bridewell. Colonel Telyrand is now present, and ready to swear to this fact."

The prisoner had been listening with close attention, and his careless air had given place to an earnest and indignant one.

He now excitedly denied the last assertion, declaring that his name was Walter Spencer and had always been Walter Spencer.

His assertion made little impression on the gray-haired veterans around him, and the detective laid four papers before General Meade.

"Here are the two letters to Lee, and two papers written by the so-called Spencer as a staff officer of General Warfield. I ask you, General Meade, to compare the penmanship."

Meade looked at them carefully, and then silently passed the lot to Warfield.

The latter looked, and his face grew blank. The writing in each and every case seemed alike.

"They are forgeries!" cried the major, who had looked over Warfield's shoulder. "There is an infamous plot against me!"

"I have no wish to be harsh or premature," replied Meade, gravely, "but the writing looks to me like that of one man."

"I never wrote to Lee," asserted Spencer, "and I never wrote such treasonable letters in my life!"

At this point a second prisoner was bought in, well guarded.

He was the person who had been arrested just after leaving Spencer, and on whose person was found document "B."

He was questioned, but nothing could make him unclose his lips.

He heard their questions without so much as winking and answered nothing.

Had he been a statue he could not have been more silent and stoical.

He was taken away and Colonel Telyrand was called. He positively identified Spencer as Robert Bridewell, whom he had heard speak at secession meetings in the spring of 1861.

The evidence seemed crushing, and General Warfield looked very blank, but the accused sprang to his feet.

"Gentlemen," he exclaimed, "I call for justice in this case. The evidence looks terribly against me, but I will yet prove that I am innocent of all. Colonel Telyrand has made a mistake, but it is one easily righted. The idea that I am Bridewell is, really, absurd. Bridewell, in 1861, was much smaller than I, slightly built and light complexioned, with blue eyes. Is that my appearance? Send for the men of my old regiment, and they will prove that I am Walter Spencer. This charge is absurd. As for the traitorous letters, I never wrote them. Some one," here he looked sharply at the detective, "has forged my writing. Gentlemen, I have served under all of you for two years. You know me and my record. General Meade, himself, has been good enough to mention me in his official report for what he termed 'gallant and meritorious' services. I ask you, gentlemen, if any one has tried harder to save the Union then I, in my humble sphere."

General Warfield sprang to his feet.

"Gentlemen," he said, with energy, "this man so freely accused by unknown parties is a heroic officer whom we, his friends and admirers, have been pleased to term, for his valor and vim, the 'Firebrand of the Potomac.' Can we believe such a man guilty of treason?"

It was a point well made, but, to offset it, there was evidence which seemed irrefragible.

General Meade did not allow himself to be moved by inferior emotions, but, as a just and loyal man should be, was guided solely by the evidence.

This evidence pointed strongly to the major's guilt; in fact, there did not seem room for doubt.

The letters might be forged; such a thing was possible; but what of the fact that Robert Bridewell, once an avowed secessionist, being in the Union army under a false name? As for his record as a staff officer, Benedict Arnold furnished a marked precedent to show that a traitor may be trusted even to the hour of his exposure.

Such being the case, General Meade announced, after consulting the other eminent officers present—Warfield alone demurred—that he should hold the accused for formal trial, and at once send him to Washington.

With Lee moving northward, there was no time for attending to the case then.

This decision brought the major again to his feet, and he asked leave to call witnesses to prove that he was really Walter Spencer. He mentioned two; one was General Messenger, who had been his colonel at Bull Run; the other was Major Wendell, who had been his captain at the same time.

As both these men could soon be brought, his request was agreed to and messengers dispatched for them.

Spencer settled back looked at Warfield, and tried to smile easily.

"I haven't seen either one to talk with them since '61," he observed, "but they will remember me. I was a lieutenant under Wendell, and we were on good terms."

The party waited as patiently as possible, though Meade received some dispatches which made him look grave, and indicated news from Lee's army, but what it was he did not divulge.

The summoned officers soon arrived—General Messenger and Major Wendell. The prisoner looked at them eagerly, but neither showed a sign of recognition.

"Gentlemen," said Meade, "you are wanted to identify this officer. Please tell what you know of him."

They looked at the prisaner.

"I recognize him as Major Spencer, a staff officer under General Warfield, but know no more about him," Messenger replied, somewhat wonderingly.

"Was he in your regiment when you commanded the —— Indiana?"

"Not that I am aware of, sir."

"Major Wendell, you were then captain of a company. Was there a Lieutenant Spencer in it?"

"Yes, general, but Major Spencer is not the man. Lieutenant Spencer was killed, or captured, at Bull Run. He has never been seen since."

"My God, Wendell!" exclaimed the prisoner, "do you deny me like that?"

Wendell looked very much confused, and turned his gaze back to Meade, wonderingly.

"Major Wendell, did that Lieutenant Spencer resemble Major Spencer?" the general continued.

"Not in the least, general. The lieutenant was forty pounds lighter, and his complexion was a pronounced blonde."

"I can certify to that," added Messenger. "I remember Walter Spencer well; he had the finest blue eyes I ever saw."

"And Major Spencer is not the man?"

"Certainly not," was the emphatic reply, and all who saw the prisoner's black and dark eyes agreed that he did not answer the description.

But the major looked at them one after the other in dazed wonder, though he showed no signs of detected guilt.

"Is this all a practical joke, or am I dreaming?" he said, turning helplessly to Warfield.

Some of the officers smiled sarcastically. They believed the prisoner's guilt established beyond question, and thought that though he was playing the innocent well, it was time thrown away.

So the examination ended.

Of course there could be but one result, and the accused was pronounced probably guilty, and the order given that he should be taken to Washington.

He was led back to jail. Jack Hill accompanied him, but Warfield had dropped his head on his hand and spoke no word.

"They all believe me guilty, Jack," said the major, bitterly.

"All but me," quickly replied the captain.

"Ay, you are true, old boy, for which, God bless you. But do you not fear for your reputation?"

"I'll never desert a friend," was the stubborn reply.

"Noble fellow! Jack, what terrible fatality it is I don't know, but when all these men described the so-called Spencer, with blue eyes and towy hair, they gave an exact picture of the Bridewell they accuse me of being. What does it all mean? I am in a terrible daze, and though I love the Union as well as any man living, I stand a good chance of being hung as a spy. Jack, what does it mean? Why are they all against me? I am in the meshes of a net from which escape seems impossible!"

CHAPTER VIII.

AN OPEN PRISON-DOOR.

Major Spencer was not taken to Washington according to the original plan. The fact was produced by the arguments of one Robert E. Lee, emphasized by several thousand muskets and cannon. By this we do not mean to say that the Southern Napolean took up Spencer's quarrel and made it the occasion of fresh hostilitly between the North and South.

No. General Lee happened to be in Pennsylvania on business at this time, with several thousand other business men with him. Their business was to live on the property and food of the Unionists, strike dismay to the Northern heart, gallop up to Washington, Baltimore and other cities at their leisure, and turn the fortunes of war in favor of the rebellious states. And it was unquestionably one of the greatest business men's parades ever seen in that or any other campaign.

But how did all this effect Major Spencer?

We have not given the initial of Lee's invasion, and need not. Enough of that, after certain successes in Virginia, he pushed North and entered Pennsylvania.

Of course he frightened a good many people, but patriotism triumphed over all other things, and another army might have been raised had it been necessary. But it was not. Hooker and the Army of the Potomac were on guard over the capital, and when Lee tried to put his heavy foot on Pennsylvania, Hooker tried to put his foot on Lee.

He would have succeeded, undoubtedly,

had he not been superceded at this juncture by General Meade, and it was left to this capable officer to fight and win Gettysburg. At and near this place Lee concentrated his forces, and Meade moved upon him. The rapidly occurring scenes of our latest chapters took place just before this battle, which explains why Spencer's case could not then be considered in detail.

Meade, being now in chief command, directed that the prisoner should be taken to Washington, but those who tried to execute the order ran across a party of rebels and fell back to the army in confusion, which explains why the major was not taken to the capital.

And so the bloody field of Gettysburg drew near with Walter Spencer—or whoever he really was—held a prisoner in the army where he had hoped to fight with his comrades. Separated from his promised wife and disgraced as a soldier, his was not an enviable situation.

Events had transpired peculiarly.

When the major obtained his furlough to go to Gettysburg and enroll himself a married man, no one had expected what followed—Lee's invasion and the change of base by the Union army; but what had been a peaceful scene now became one of doubt, danger and warfare.

Lee had taken position for the great battle about to ensue, and the loyal troops were closing in rapidly. It was expected, on the day of which we have last written, that the last would arrive the following morning and the ball be opened.

When Captain Jack Hill had seen his friend once more in the guard-house, he felt miserable enough, but he thought of some one else who must be miserable, and, after some thought, applied to his colonel for four hours' absence.

He was at first refused, owing to the existing crisis, but he finally carried his point, and, mounting a horse, rode away at a gallop.

He soon passed Gettysburg, but not much further did he go. After some inquiring he learned where Abram Waters lived, and he was soon at the house.

It was a household of grief.

News of the preliminary examination had come to them, and all except Barbara and Adam had given up hope.

Waters, when out of the girl's hearing, railed at Spencer, called him "an infernal scoundrel," and in other ways showed his lack of faith.

All this did Spencer no harm, as he did not hear it, and it served to ease off the old gentleman's mind.

Adam defended the major stoutly against all slanderers; but, it must be confessed, he had grave doubts himself. One thing he had always remembered as peculiar; and that was the fact that the men he saw dead in the road in the wood that night of flight had been rebels instead of Unionists.

Spencer, it will be remembered, had insisted that in the voice of the leader of the foremost party he had recognized Bridewell, but when this party turned at bay and fired, the men whom they killed were rebels. According to Spencer's theory, they should have been Unionists, for why should rebel chase rebel, and then kill each other!

He had once asked this question of the major, but the latter had declared that Adam's eyes had deceived him—that the dead men had been Unionists, not rebels, and laughed down the whole question.

Adam dropped the discussion but he did not forget the occurrence, and with the latest allegations before him, he had been putting into shape, for his private benefit, the following elaborate question:

"If Spencer is not Spencer, but, as they say, is Bridewell, and the real Spencer was killed or captured at Bull Run, may it not be that when the false Spencer was with us in the bushes and heard the voice which he declared was Bridewell's, he really heard the voice of the real Spencer, and that Spencer, already pursued sharply, was killed or captured just after we heard him?"

Adam tried to answer this question, but it was so stupendous both in its formation and significance that he became lost and never found the answer.

Yet, Adam defended Spencer warmly against Waters' attacks. Why? Simply because Barbara believed in the major, and Adam was so devoted to her that he would have sworn that her lover was General Washington, restored to life and youth, had Barbara so instructed him.

Such was the affairs when Captain Jack Hill rode up to the farmhouse, but as chance would have it, he found only Barbara and Adam at home, and he did not suspect that the household was divided against itself.

He found stanch friends of his friend, and rejoiced thereat.

He did not, however, conceal his grave fears, and it was a melancholy little circle.

"It's a pity," said Adam, "that he and his escort party were not captured this afternoon. Better be a prisoner of his enemies than of his friends, just at this time."

Barbara brightened.

"Perhaps in the coming battle something may occur to release him," she said.

"What, for instance?" asked Jack, looking at her sharply.

"The Union army may be driven back, or even defeated."

"We intend to win," said Jack, bluffly. "But, Miss Deane, if Walt had the right kind of friends, he would not sleep in that prison over night."

"What do you mean?"

"Considering the excitement and the shifting of troops, the guard-house will not be closely watched to-night;" and Hill winked significantly.

"I still fail to understand."

"Confound it, will you make a Yankee officer speak plain on such a subject? Miss Deane, and you, Mr. Adam, if I were not a loyal man, I'll bet my head I could get Walt out of prison to-night."

Barbara started.

"Rescue him?"

"Yes."

There was a brief silence.

"That would be dangerous business," said Adam, finally.

"You are right; it would," Jack replied. "Too dangerous for an officer like me to engage in."

"We understand," said Barbara, absently.

They did understand, and for a while there was a silence. Miss Deane thought deeply.

Adam watched her closely. Hill watched both the others. Anon, Barbara looked earnestly at Adam, who nodded quickly.

"Captain Hill," said the girl, "tell us how to do it."

Jack drew a deep breath. He was about to launch out in an enterprise which, if discovered, would ruin him forever.

It was a great risk to take, but he was devoted to Major Spencer, and resolved to help him all that was possible.

So he explained his plan.

Midnight.

Major Spencer sat alone in his prison room. It was not an uncomfortable place, for to its natural advantages had been added some articles not usually kept there, but he scarcely knew what was in the room.

He sat with his head bowed down on his hands, miserable enough. He knew a battle was soon to take place.

He longed to be in the action; to do his share toward driving the invaders out of Pennsylvania; but here he was, disgraced and confined like a criminal in a miserable den.

He thought of this and Barbara Deane. He had been separated from her, when, a half hour later, she would have been his wife.

Truly, he had enough over which to be miserable.

He arose and excitedly paced the floor.

"What does it mean? Why have all these people—many of them men who have professed to be my friends—conspired against me? What evil fate has set in against me? Who forged those letters? The writing was marvelously like mine. It is a deep, deep plot, but who is at the bottom of it? Most of all, what is their object in trying to prove that I am Robert Bridewell? Is it not enough to prove me a traitor by their foul lies? Why need they thrust upon me the identity of that scoundrel? They are all against me—even to Glendora, whom I have helped, to whom I have been a true friend. She says she is Mrs. Walter Spencer. Rubbish! she is jealous of Barbara—though Heaven knows I never before suspected she had a liking for me—and so has joined herself with my enemies. Well, they seem to have me fast. I suppose they will hang me like a dog!"

He laughed bitterly and paced the more rapidly, but a key suddenly rattled in the lock and he turned his gaze on the door.

Perhaps Jack Hill had come to see him.

The door opened and he started back.

"Barbara!"

Adam was just behind her, and as she hurried forward he wisely turned his head.

When he looked the girl was in Spencer's arms.

Adam thought that was as it should be.

"God bless you!" said the prisoner, in a moved voice. "I knew you would not desert me, Barbara."

"I have not; I never will; but this is no time to talk idly. We have come to take you away. Come!"

"To take me away?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean? Is it possible my innocence has at last been established!"

"No, no; but the way of escape is found—your prison door is open. Don't you understand? Adam and I have worked for you—your guard lies outside drugged and unconscious, and in the confusion which exists we can leave the camp and you will be safe. They will not think of pursuing you until the battle is over, and by that time we will be in Canada, safe."

Spencer's arms fell by his side.

"Barbara," he exclaimed, "would you have me flee like a coward and traitor?"

"Oh, it would not be that—it would be saving yourself from those who have unjustly accused you."

"Justly or not, I am a soldier and a loyal man, and I will not play the craven's part."

"But think of what they accuse you!" cried poor Barbara, appalled at the result of all her daring and risk.

"I know and admit that the case looks dark," said the major, gravely, "but I cannot run like a coward."

"Methinks you'd better run like a coward than be strung up by the neck like a spy," said Adam, bluntly.

"Old friend is this the part of honor?"

"No, it's the part of safety," was the poetical reply.

"Walter, Walter," cried the girl, "do not say you refuse to leave this horrible place. Adam and I have risked all for you. We passed the rearmost soldiers by—by accidentally learning certain secrets, and when Adam offered the man on guard at the door a bottle of drugged liquor the old strategem succeeded. The soldier called Adam a kind old farmer, drank and fell asleep. Now, the way is open—your prison door is open Oh, do not tell me you persist in such madness as to stay here."

Spencer was paler than he had been at any time before since his arrest.

"Would you have me act a dishonorable part?" he asked, deeply moved.

"Oh, Walter, I would not have you stay to be executed as a spy. They all say it will be so; they do, indeed, and, God help me, it will kill me!"

She burst into tears, and the prisoner wiped from his forehead perspiration which was brought there by pure mental agony.

His face quivered, but when he spoke his voice expressed only the deepest solicitude for her.

"Poor Barbara!" he murmured, "I would to Heaven I could comply with your request, but shall I cast eternal shame on the name I bear by running away? My dear girl, when a man becomes a soldier, he loses his own identity and becomes merely a servant of his country. I, Barbara, love the doar old flag and the grand confederation of states better than my own life. For the Union, I am ready to die, if Providence so wills. I had hoped it would be on the field of battle, if at all, but it seemed fated to be in another way."

"Mad!—mad as a march hare!"

The interruption came from Adam.

Spencer smiled wearily.

"Old friend, I am painfully sane. I am not so mad as to comply with the scheme you are mad enough to propose. Suppose that I flee—that I go to Canada. What do I gain? An existence which would be henceforth abhorred and reviled as that of a traitor. I should be an exile forever from the land of my birth. That is what I should gain by going. What do I lose by remaining? A life which is at my country's service, here or on the battlefield."

"Your country don't want, and won't acknowledge, lives which go out by the hangman's noose," rudely, angrily, replied Adam, who was very much disgusted.

"Old friend, you will some day be sorry for that curt speech," said the prisoner, with grave kindness. "Yet, leaving its curtness aside, I want to say that when a man enters the Union army, loyally agreeing to risk his life in that grand cause, he does for his country, whether his life goes out on the battlefield, in the hospital, or by the hangman's noose, as you call it."

"Oh! Walter, do not use that expression!" exclaimed Barbara.

"No, don't!" added Adam, emphatically. "I only used it to bring you to your senses, and I'm sorry for it."

"If coming to my senses means to flee, I shall not be sensible," replied the major. "I am an innocent man, and no one loves the Union better than I, and I put my life in the balance to be saved or lost according to the turn of the scale. I am not hopeless, for I shall try to show that there is a plot against me. But I shall stay here and meet my trial."

Nothing could turn him from this resolution, as his would-be rescuers found.

We need not dwell on the interview.

Barbara wept profusely, and her sorrow seemed to give him great pain, but he persisted in his determination.

They gave up at last, and, after a memorable farewell, left the jail and locked the door behind them, according to his directions. The drugged guard was just beginning to stir, and when they had restored the keys to their former place there was nothing to show that they had been there.

They went away in deep gloom, from which Barbara finally aroused to say:

"He is brave and noble, Adam."

To which Adam replied:

"He was set enough; that's a fact; but there's something about the matter I don't understand. The major seems to me to be a mysterious sort of a critter!"

CHAPTER IX.

GETTYSBURG.

Among the great battles of the world, the long and desperate struggle at Gettysburg holds a prominent place. It was one where vast interests were at stake. Resulting as it did in the defeat of the rebel forces, it filled the South with temporary dismay and necessitated the retreat of Lee back to that state, which, from the large number of battles fought therein during the great civil war, might also be regarded as one vast battlefield—Virginia.

On the other hand, had the Union army been defeated, no one can accurately demonstrate the misfortunes which would have ensued. Lee would have turned upon the large cities within the loyal range, and either Washington, Baltimore, or Philadelphia would doubtless have been smitten, and probably captured.

What would have followed then is also unknown, but the light of many burning dwellings might have made red the black night within and without.

With Gettysburg in detail we have nothing to do.

The story has been told and it is well known even to the younger generation.

To Barbara Deane and the household it really meant little, for they were beyond the reach of missiles of war, if not of its echoes.

We have introduced Meade, who, it will be remembered, had superseded Hooker and other soldiers while they were on their way to the grand arena of battle, as a photographer pictures his patrons at a temporary sitting.

The army moved on, Gettysburg was reached, and then began the great fight.

Three days it continued, and brave men fell plentifully on each side; men who were mere privates, and men renowned as skillful generals.

It was a meeting of giants, and as they wrestled for the mastery, struggling to and fro, the whole country listened with bated breath for the sequel.

Possibly the fate of the nation was at stake.

It was the last day of the battle. The red tide flowed hotly, and the anxious participants, somehow, felt that a few hours would decide the matter, one way or the other.

Which would win?

The momentous question was a hard one to answer

At one point along the line the Southerners had gained an advantage. A ridge, the possession of which was coveted by both parties, had been wrested by them from the Union men.

Its recovery became a most desirable object.

A charge was projected and made. Several regiments received their orders, and then, as one, they rushed forward up the slope.

It was like going into the jaws of death.

They encountered a terrible fire.

The leaden hail swept down from the summit, and men fell at every pace.

Still the gallant fellows pushed on.

But a moment was at hand when even they wavered.

Their leader, who, riding at the front, and waving his sword above his head, suddenly reeled in his saddle, dropped the sword, and fell to the ground, dead!

Then the line wavered.

The calamity came at a most unfortunate moment, and, left without a leader, the gallant fellows lost, not courage, but the confidence which good leadership inspires, and the rebels thrilled at the impression that they had dealt a fatal blow.

But the scene suddenly changed.

A man who has been advancing on foot with the others suddenly springs forward, catches up the fallen sword and leaps into the vacant saddle.

He turns and waves his sword aloft.

"Come on!" he cries. "I will lead you. God is with us and the Union—charge!"

A ringing cheer goes up from the loyal troops.

They do not recognize the speaker, but he wears the uniform of a Union major, and his words and example inspire a feeling of resistless ardor.

With that cheer still on their lips, the Union men surge forward.

They go up the ascent like a mighty wave.

Bullets cleave the air like hail-stones; other men fall, but the survivors are undaunted.

At their head rides the unknown major. Colonels followed him, too excited to feel the least thrill of jealousy.

The major seems to bear a charmed life. He is the target of scores of muskets, and he rides with reckless haste, but not a shot touches him.

Up and on they go. The slope is red and slippery behind them, but their gaze is ever toward the front.

Their ardor is resistless. So might the Old Guard have charged had they been at Gettysburg that day.

Hurrah! hurrah! They reach the rebel line; they spring at the enemy like tigers—the mysterious major cleaves a disloyal head, beats down an opposing sword, and runs through a stalwart rifleman.

The shock is resistless, the hill is won, the rebels retreat in hot haste and a wild shout of victory runs along the line.

"That charge has saved the day," says a staff officer, who is watching through a glass, addressing General Meade. "All honor to General ——"

But the general he named lies dead near the foot of the slope, and the man who has led the way to victory is unknown to the troops he has led.

About the same time there is another eventful charge.

The battle had reached a crisis.

The rebels hurl a strong force upon the loyal line.

It is repulsed, thrown back in confusion and demoralized.

It is practically the last effort of the Southerners, and the netting of wires that cover the country may well carry the message:

"Gettysburg is won!"

Grateful for that charge which we have described at length, General Meade takes measures to congratulate the general he thinks has won the hill.

Then he learns for the first time that officer's fate.

"Who, then, led the charge?" he asked.

A young man is a major's uniform, which is covered with blood not drawn from his own veins, rides forward and tenders his sword to the commander-in- chief.

"General Meade," he says, "the fight is won and I am again your prisoner."

The men he led do not understand the act and they cheer wildly, but Meade looks in blank surprise.

"Major Spencer!" he says, wonderingly.

"Yes, general," the major replies, "you wonder to see me out of jail. Well, the guards were careless and left the door open, and I mounted a horse and rode here, hoping to die on the field. My wish has not been gratified, but I have, at least, had one more chance to fight for the cause we both love—the perpetuity of the Union. General, the fight is over and I am again your prisoner. Here is my sword."

But a messenger comes to the leader and he goes away, leaving Spencer unanswered and unarrested.

The major looks toward the rear where, miles away, he knows the jail remains intact.

"I will return alone," he says, and then rides away.

"It is the most mysterious case I ever knew."

The words were spoken the day after the battle of Gettysburg by General Meade to several of his most celebrated officers.

No one answered him, and all looked as blank as they were mute.

"Here is an officer under arrest for treason, charged with being a spy, and with the charges so well substantiated that even he must know the proofs are fatally conclusive in seeming, and he walks deliberately out of jail when his guards neglect their duty, and, instead of fleeing to Canada, as it seems any guilty man would, he seeks the field of battle, fights like a demon for the cause to which we charge him with being a traitor, leads a heroic charge which does much to save the battle for the Union, and then, when other duties prevent me from considering his surprising offer to surrender his sword and himself, rides deliberately back to jail and orders the guard to lock him it. I have seen some strange things during my military career, but nothing equal to this."

"You are right," said another general, "for, with this charge hovering over him, he knew it was sure death when he returned to the jail."

"And why did he, a convicted traitor, fight so like a hero for the Union?" asked a third officer. "We owe more to him toward saving Gettsyburg than to any other subordinate officer."

"Confound it!" cried General Warfield, "the explanation is simply enough—the man is innocent. He is as loyal as I am."

"How about the letters in his own hand writing—those fatally disloyal letters?" asked Meade, gravely.

"Forgeries!" cried Warfield.

"Again, why is he with us under a false name?"

"I declare that his name, begging your pardon, general, is Walter Spencer," said Warfield, very red in the face.

"We have proved by unimpeachable witnesses that he is not Walter Spencer," replied General Meade, "and almost as good testimony shows him to be Robert Bridewell, an original secessionist, and, subsequently, a rebel officer. Besides, were not his letters to Lee signed Robert Bridewell?"

"Confound it! I'm all at sea!" acknowledged Warfield.

"Isn't he mentally deranged?" suggested a gray-bearded general, thoughtfully.

"Nonsense!" cried Warfield. "I've known him for two years, and a clearer head I never knew; no, nor a more loyal one, either. I tell you, it is a plot against the poor boy!"

"Then he must be in the plot against himself," said Meade, dryly. "There is no room to doubt that he wrote those letters. His writing is peculiar and not to be mistaken, and I don't believe any man could forge it. Besides, letter 'B' was secured from a man who had just left Spencer's tent. But we will have him before us, gentlemen."

The order was given and obeyed, and in a short time the major appeared. He was neatly dressed, handsome, clear-eyed, calm and at his ease, and as he saluted the illustrious officers before him, he looked them in the face frankly and fearlessly, though not defiantly or staringly.

"He looks to be as brave, manly and clear-headed a fellow as there is in the army," said Slocum, to Howard.

"You are right. There's nothing wrong in his upper story, and I never saw a finer looking fellow."

"Major Spencer," said General Meade, with a touch of facetiousness which even old soldiers sometimes indulge in, "we see in you a somewhat notable curiosity—a man who arrested himself, and requested, possibly compelled, a jailer to lock him up for trial."

Spencer smiled gravely.

"Having issued my own furlough, I thought it incumbent on me to arrest myself when I found the furlough was illegal, general."

"Didn't you think of that when you left the jail?"

"Joking aside, I did, of course, general."

"Then why did you leave?"

"The guards carelessly left the door unlocked and wandered away to a hill from which, perhaps, they were able to see a part of the battle. I discovered the fact, and, with the guns of Gettysburg sending their thunder to my ears, was seized with a

desire to fight once more for the Union. Yet, that was not all, general, as I freely confess. I was desperate, and I went to Gettysburg hoping to be killed there."

"That would not have established your innocence."

"It would have made me forever unconscious of the disgrace attached to my name."

"Did you not think of Canada, my boy?" asked Warfield.

"General, Canada is the refuge of cowards and guilty men."

"And you are neither, I'll swear!" cried the previous speaker, emphatically.

"I certainly am not guilty; as for the cowardice part——"

"You led the most heroic charge of Gettysburg!" his old friend declared.

General Meade frowned a little. He wished Warfield's confidence was substantiated by facts, but all the proof was on the other side.

Yet, what was he to think of this puzzling case? It was, indeed, deeply mysterious.

"Major," he said, earnestly, "answer one question frankly. Is your name Robert Bridewell?"

"General, upon my word of honor, it is not. I am named Walter Spencer."

Clearly, calmly, decisively the mysterious major made his statement.

"Yet, General Messenger, Major Wendell and others declare emphatically that you are not Walter Spencer. Have you any reason to believe they are speaking falsely through any motive whatever?"

"I cannot see why they should. General Messenger, who was my old colonel, was always kind to me, and Tom Wendell and I shared the same tent for weeks. He was a good friend and a true friend."

"And he ought to know whether you are his old comrade or not, hadn't he?"

"He certainly ought, but he don't seem to," Spencer replied, with a puzzled air.

"How did it happen, if you were old friends, that so long a time passed without your meeting each other?"

"I was in the hospital a long time after Bull Run, and when I recovered, I met General Warfield, was transferred to his staff, and by the frequent changes which all knew took place in my old regiment, did not again meet any of its members."

The examination went on, but it only served to make perplexity more perplexing. It did not serve to explain away the dark points in the major's case, though all were impressed by his air of seeming sincerity, and Warfield took occasion to comment on his heroic record from the time he first joined his staff to the charge at Gettysburg.

That a traitor and branded spy, menaced by a violent and ignominious death, should deliberately return to his prison, instead of striking out for Lee's army, or to Canada, seemed beyond the bounds of reason.

Yet, this man, who seemed proven a traitor and spy, had insisted on being retained a prisoner.

"By George!" said one gray-headed veteran, "he ought to be pardoned, anyhow, for his heroism at Gettysburg."

But General Meade resolved to test the worth of the suggestion that the major might be wrong mentally, and five accomplished surgeons were sent for to pronounce judgment on that important point.

CHAPTER X.

BREDWICK IS DENIED!

Spencer treated the new suggestion with a quiet smile of amusement.

"The idea is a good one," said he, "and I would like to suggest, general, that you don't stop with me. It would not be a bad idea for a commission in lunacy, or whatever you call it, to give a little time to these men who assert that I am not myself."

"We will test you first."

They did so.

The surgeons came, and were informed that, two years before, the prisoner had been wounded in the head. The question for them to solve was to decide whether he had fully recovered from that injury, or was then mentally deranged in any way.

The surgeons looked at the major, and the major looked at them.

His quiet smile was amused, cool and rational. They noticed this, and mentally decided that he was as well balanced mentally as any one in the room.

But they examined his head. They found a scar—the mark of an ugly wound—but it appeared to have in no way injured brain or skull.

At present it seemed as harmless as a cut on one of his fingers. While working, they took closer notice of his actions. He jested with Warfield, and spoke coherently and to the point.

He did not grow restless under their investigations, and his shapely hands scarcely moved. No nervousness there.

"General Meade," said one of the surgeons, at the conclusion, "not twenty-five per cent. of the men of your army have the well-balanced head and coolness of this gentleman. After this wound once healed it amounted to nothing. The major is perfectly sane."

The verdict had been expected by all, but it left the case more puzzling than ever, and the major was sent back to jail, while the officers considered his affair further, and become more confused than before.

Like a good angel came to their troubled eyes the secret service detective who had hunted Spencer down.

"General," he said, addressing Meade, "I have just learned that we have, among our prisoners, Colonel Bredwick, of the —— South Carolina regiment. He was in Virginia for several years previous to the war, and was intimate with both the Spencer and Bridewell families. Rumor has it he was concerned with Robert Bridewell in a disreputable affair just before the war. I suggest that without any hint to either men, we place him and our major, the *soi disant* Spencer, in the same room, and that we be concealed where we can witness their meeting. Bredwick knew both Spencer and Bridewell, and in his surprise, and unwarned by any one, he is sure to call the other by his correct name."

The idea seemed to be a brilliant one, and General Meade caught at it at once.

Arrangements were immediately made. The cell occupied by the mysterious major was of such a nature that two or three men could watch through a barred window and, themselves concealed by the branches and leaves of a tree, hear and see all.

Meade, Warfield and the detective were soon there, and Bredwick was escorted to the jail.

He had not changed greatly since Bull Run, when we met him at Adam's cottage, except wind, sun and wine had colored his face somewhat darker, and he was still the pompous fellow who drank up all Adam's wine.

While being escorted to the jail he swaggered and held his head very high, and probably thought that the despised Unionists "gazed on him as on a lion bound," as the poem has it.

Singularly enough, he frightened nobody, however.

Unconscious of the test awaiting him, the major got in his cell and read a paper with an unconcerned air.

He was the coolest prisoner, probably, that was ever in the place, yet his case was one of the most desperate.

The key clicked in the lock, the bolt shot back, the door opened, and some one entered.

Spencer looked up, and the door closed with a clang.

The two men, the major and Bredwick, stood facing each other, the only occupants of the cell.

For a moment they looked in silence, and the watchers saw that both were surprised, but over the major's face there stole a hard, threatening expression, and then Bredwick burst out in his usual fashion.

"Great Pompey! am I dreaming, or is that you, Rob Bridewell? Egad! I thought you'd been dead these two years—I swear I did——"

The big fellow was advancing with extended hand, joy beaming on his blotched face, but the major drew himself erect and put up one hand threateningly.

"Stand back, you scoundrel! or I'll knock you through the door! How dare you call me Rob Bridewell!"

"What the dickens should I call you?" cried Bredwick, in seeming surprise. "Are you a general now and want your title? Egad! why, you've got on a Yank uniform. What the blazes does that mean?

The major looked angry and disgusted, but he was as cool as usual.

"Bredwick," he replied, "chance or design—it may be the latter, now I think it over——"

"Keen as a briar, isn't he?" whispered Warfield, at the window.

"Has made us occupants of the same cell," continued the major. "Now, we know each other of old, and hate each other cordially, and I should be pleased under other circumstances to wring the neck of such a consummate scoundrel, but since we are together here, I suggest a truce. So, don't call me Rob Bridewell again. My name is Spencer, as I'll trouble you to remember."

"Eh! What? Your name Spencer?" cried Bredwick, his face the picture of amazement.

"Certainly it is, you——"

"Ah! I see. You're sailing under false colors."

"What do you mean?"

"It somehow gets through my head," said Bredwick, "that, knowing Walt Spencer is in Libby Prison, you have assumed his name and identity, and are now a flourishing Yank *pro tem.*"

"Oh! I understand; they have 'seen' you," observed the major with a scornful curl of his lip.

"Eh! Who's seen me?"

"That's just what I want to know. Bredwick, tell me who sent you here to act this part and I'll abandon my vendetta against you. We are old enemies, and I had sworn to shoot you, but I'll let up if you will put me on the track."

There was a touch of eagerness in the speaker's voice, but Bredwick dropped into a chair and looked at him helplessly.

"Am I mad, foolish, drunk, or dreaming?" he demanded in a hopeless voice. "Of course if you want to shake me, that is your privilege, but I can't see the sense in all this rigmarole. You are Rob Bridewell, and it isn't likely I can forget a man I have known all my life."

The major sat down, once more perfectly cool.

"It is as I suspected," he steadily replied, "you have been bribed."

"So has your grandfather," retorted Bredwick. "Do you suppose I'd let an infernal Yankee bribe me? Not by a blamed sight! Zounds! I wouldn't affiliate with them for any money. See here, Rob, we are companions in misfortune, at least, I judge so, though I don't understand why you have on a Yankee uniform, and we ought to pull together, hadn't we?"

"You insist that I am Robert Bridewell?"

"Why, of course I do."

"And you say Walter Spencer is in Libby Prison?"

"Yes, I saw him there not two months ago."

"How long has he been there?"

"He has been a prisoner ever since Bull Run in one place and another. He got separated from the other Yanks when they retreated, and his career as a Yank was nipped in the bud."

"Allow me to ask what became of Bridewell after Bull Run?"

"You were supposed to be killed, though your body was never found."

"Very likely," was the sarcastic comment. "I usually take care of my body myself. And you still persist that I am Bridewell?"

The Confederate's eyes grew unnaturally large.

"Why, hang it, what are you driving at?" he demanded. "I would as soon forget my own name as your face. Haven't I known you all my life?"

"Yes, and I've known you," replied the major, sharply. "I've known you so well that this new turn don't surprise me. You are capable of any rascality, and I see that my enemies have bribed you. Well, so be it, Bredwick, but you cannot expect me to play into your hands. Scoundrel, only that the war separated us I would have made you smart before this for your share in robbing Glendora Marchmont of her money."

"Didn't you put me up to it?"

"I? No, sir, I did not."

"Who gave me charge of the case?'

"Oh! I perceive that you still insist that I am Bridewell. Very well, Bredwick, I'm going to show you that I am not the man you take me to be. Bridewell was you ally, your principal, your fellow knave. I, Walter Spencer, hate both him and you. I may never be able to get square with him, but you, Bredwick, you—— Will you confess you have lied about me?"

There was a threatening light in the major's eyes and an ominous ring to his voice, and the fat rebel looked disconcerted.

"Why, hang it, I haven't lied, you know," he said, anxious to keep peace in the jail.

"Sir, I demand that you retract your statement that I am Robert Bridewell?"

Bredwick brushed his big hands across his eyes.

"The devil!" he ejaculated. "What are

you driving at, Bob? I haven't the slightest idea, upon my soul!"

"I'll explain," replied the major, with subdued though perceptible fierceness. "You say I am Bridewell; I say I am not. I demand that you retract,"

"Why, of course I'll do so if you wish," hastily agreed the Confederate. "You're my friend, and I'll do anything for you. Of course I wouldn't give you away publicly, but I did not see any harm in talking solid facts while we were alone, and I wanted to have one of our old-time, friendly chats, you know, Bridewell."

The major's eyes had blazed all the more as the fellow went on, and at the last word he sprang forward and caught him by the throat, shaking the huge rascal as a dog does a rat.

"You scoundrel!" he exclaimed, "how dare you claim my friendship? You my friend! I would as soon make friends with an ugly toad. I see you have sold yourself to my enemies, and I'll pay you for that and the old score!"

He did not relax his hold while speaking, and the big rebel struggled frantically and vainly in his grasp, growing red in the face, and seeming to be in such actual danger of being strangled that the watchers hastily quitted their positions, found the jailer and had the door opened.

As they crowded in the major flung his well-shaken prey at their feet.

"Take this swine away!" he said, with cold contempt. "Whatever you may do with me, do not inflict his presence upon me!"

And then he turned away and sat down again, as calm as though nothing had happened.

His request was complied with, Bredwick was taken away, but no one addressed the major, and even Warfield went away with a gloomy expression.

The mysterious prisoner's identity seemed settled beyond a shadow of doubt.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MAN FROM LIBBY.

In a large, square room three men were seated. One wore the uniform of a Confederate general; the other two appeared to be colonels.

Evidently they were transacting some kind of official business, for the table between them was covered with papers, but they were not without relief from arduous toil.

Three wine glasses, two well filled bottles and four empty ones, proved that they had not only enjoyed themselves in the past, but were capable of keeping it up some time longer.

Each man was smoking, too, and a cigar box near the bottles held half a hundred untouched Havanas.

They had ceased working, and the general was telling a story as the door opened, and the orderly who appeared saluted respectfully.

"General, the man from Libby has arrived," he announced.

"Bring him in, Philips. And, by George, gentlemen, the wounded man, in his next fit of coughing, actually threw up a bullet from his lungs," said the general, continuing his story; "and five more followed it. What is more to the point, he recovered, and is to-day in the army, fighting well. His chest bears six scars where the six bullets entered, but no one, seeing them, would suspect that six lumps of lead laid six months in his lungs, and were then coughed up on the sixth day of the week, at, or near, six o'clock. That's why I always bet on the number six, gentlemen, and win so regularly and often. It is also singular that the man recovered from such wounds."

The admiring colonels gravely assented, and probably thought the story worthy of a general, but, just then, the door opened and five other men entered.

One was the orderly, another a Confederate captain, two were rebel soldiers of no rank, and the fifth a man of, one might almost say, no particular order.

Never large or robust, he was reduced to a point of emaciation shocking to behold. He had flaxen hair, long and thin, scanty, light-colored whiskers, and in the midst of his cluster of prominent facial bones, which seemed merely covered with rags, blue eyes gleamed with startling brilliancy. Add to this the fact that he was clad in miserable rags and the picture is almost complete.

We have only to add that these rags were a faded blue, in color.

"The man from Libby, general!" announced the orderly.

The general had poured a glass of wine, and he tossed it down his thick neck, and then looked disgustedly at the man in rags.

He felt contaminated by such a presence, and yet he remembered that certain developments had been promised concerning him.

"Where are the witnesses?" he asked, curtly.

"They have not yet arrived, general."

"Then why the deuce did you bring this fellow in?"

"I thought—that is—you told me do so, general."

"You had no business to think. Gentlemen, have another pull at the wine. We must finish the six bottles—lucky number."

It was the colonels who were invited to "have another pull at the wine," not the man from Libby, but he looked at the sparkling stuff greedily, as though thinking what new life it would give his worn body. He unclosed his lips, too, and was about to speak when the orderly, who had retreated, returned with two other men.

"Here are the witnesses, sir," he said

The general arose, for one of the newcomers was his equal in rank—General Scholeff, in fact—and the two shook hands.

"Glad to see you see you, sir, deuced glad to see you," said the first general. "So you are a witness for this prisoner?"

"Yes, I am Corporal Bretzley," replied Scholeff.

"Is it possible you know the man?"

"Quite possible, and I know he has been terribly wronged. He has been a prisoner for two years, charged with being a Yankee, but he is as loyal as you or I."

"An awkward mistake. What's his name?"

"Walter Spencer," replied the orderly, saluting.

"Who asked you to speak!" sharply demanded Scholeff. "He was committed to prison under the name of Spencer, it is true, but it was the work of some enemy who aimed at his ruin. His real name, as I can swear, is Robert Bridewell."

The man from Libby put out his thin hands feebly.

"Such is my name," he said, eagerly, "and I am a loyal Virginian. I have been as anxious to fight for the South as any one, but some dark plot has made me seem a Yankee, and I have wasted in prison, unable to get a hearing before."

"How well do you know him, Scholeff?" asked the first general.

"Intimately. I knew him before the war, for years. So did Corporal Bretzley."

"Ay," replied that man. "He comes of an old Virginia family, general. Every one in the country knew the Bridewells, and Robert was one of the first to argue secession."

"It's too confounded bad," said the first general. "Bridewell, how did you happen to get shut up in the first place?"

"It was at Bull Run," said the prisoner, with a shiver. "I became separated from my men, after being knocked senseless by a shell or something else—I never knew what—and when I recovered I was with a lot of Yankee prisoners. I had on my uniform, but those in charge asserted that I was a Yankee in disguise. I was forced away without being allowed a chance to prove my identity, and then thrust into prison. Once there I was like a man consigned to the bastile. Months and years wore on, but all my attempts to get a hearing met with derision. I remained, half starved, ill, emaciated, almost longing for death—I, who loved the South so well."

Tears rolled down the prisoner's haggard cheeks, and he trembled so that the orderly pityingly gave him support.

"Too bad! too confounded bad!" declared the general.

"And be a true Southerner," said Scholeff, pulling fiercely at his long moustache.

"He would have been a general before now if he'd been at liberty, would Bridewell," said Corporal Bretzley.

The first general looked momentarily jealous, but he drowned the feeling in a glass of wine.

"The wrong could be righted, Bridewell," he said, emphatically. "I will bring your case to the notice of President Davis, and you shall be set free at once. General Scholeff is all the evidence we want. Of course you must go to the prison again for a few hours, but I'll send for you again in short order. No true Southerner shall stay and rot in that hole, by George!"

The man from Libby thanked him warmly, though tremulously, shook hands with General Scholeff, and was then conducted away by the soldiers.

"Too bad! too mighty bad!" repeated the general. "No Virginian should be made to suffer that way."

"Not if he is true to the South," said Scholeff, "and Rob Bridewell is as loyal as Mr. Davis. I know him well, and I knew his father before him. They are a fine family, and when Rob gets into position again, you and I will have to look out for our laurels."

"I'm jealous of no man," was the reply, "and I wish good luck to Bridewell. Come, Scholeff, take a pull at this bottle."

One day later.

Scene: The same room. Persons present, the general, and a tall, wiry man in civilian's clothes. Enter orderly, saluting.

"The man has arrived from Libby, general," he said.

"Bring him in!"

He was brought.

He was still dressed as on the previous day, but hope had so acted upon him that his face was strangely bright and eager for one so feeble.

"Good morning, Bridewell," said the general, graciously.

"Good morning, general."

"This gentleman represents the government, and, having heard your story, is going to liberate you."

How the thin face brightened

"Yes," said the civilian, "you will be set free, and, believe me, we sincerely regret your long incarceration. It was a well-nigh fatal mistake, for which some one is certainly to blame. I shall try and learn who, but in the meanwhile, you shall be taken care of. I suppose you wish to re-enter active service, as soon as you are strong enough."

"Certainly, sir. While the South is struggling to throw off a tyrant's yoke, I cannot remain inactive. The Yankees are on dear old Virginia's sacred soil, and it shall be a part of my duty to help drive them back."

The thin hands clinched, and the sunken eyes sparkled with new fire.

"Good! But, Bridewell, how would you like some work where you would be free from the privations of the battlefield and march?"

The man from Libby hesitated for a moment, looking closely at the speaker, and then replied:

"I am willing to serve the sacred cause the best I can, but my zeal would not be satisfied with a clerkship."

"Well answered, young man; well answered. It is not a clerkship, however, which we have to propose. Your peculiar situation has given rise to a certain idea. If you were to go North now, as an escaped prisoner from Libby, you would be made much of, and, in such a case, would be situated so that you could learn valuable things for the South."

He was looking at Bridewell keenly, and he saw that, while for a moment evidently perplexed, he first showed signs of comprehension, and then grew thoughtful.

"In plain words, sir, you suggest that I become a secret agent at the North?"

"A spy," added the general.

"Bridewell's term is the better one," said the civilian, curtly. "Either word covers the whole ground."

"I had not thought of it before," added the man from Libby, "but the idea strikes me rather favorably. I have the nerve for the work, I think, and, perhaps, the skill. Then, as you say, my appearance would be in my favor. It is decidedly Libby-like."

And he held up his thin hands.

"My idea is for you to make a regular escape and appear at the North in such a way that no one can doubt that you are a genuine escaped prisoner. To this end, we propose to let you and two other prisoners escape and make the journey North in due form. They, of course, will be genuine Yankees, and they will suppose you to be the same."

"I am not sure I have the strength for the journey," said Bridewell, slowly.

"Every day, or, rather, every night, for a week, you will be given nourishing food and wine, which will make you a new man. By that time you will be strong. We will arrange it for the three of you to escape properly—the other two men you can select as you see fit. For your services at the North you shall receive good pay and abundant rewards."

"All I ask is enough for my expenses," said Bridewell, with vigor. "Give me a

chance to serve the South and I am satisfied."

"Then you accept?"

"I do, sir, and I will try to do my duty."

"Very good, Mr. Bridewell. Now, for the details concerning your escape and flight, both of which we shall make easy, while seeming to be against you. You will, of course, be pursued, but you shall escape. Your work in Washington I will also describe."

CHAPTER XII.

THE SWAMP FLIGHT.

"Hark! what was that?"

"What do you mean?"

"I thought I heard the bay of a dog. Listen!"

"There is nothing to be heard."

"Perhaps you are right; I am so nervous I believe it would take but little to turn my mind."

"Be of good cheer. Libby is left behind, and, with the help of Providence, we will yet live to see the old flag."

"Heaven grant it!"

The speakers were three men who were hurrying in a narrow, bush-bordered road. The night was dark, which made them all look very much alike, and concealed the fact that they were clad in rags that had once been uniforms in blue.

In brief they were Bridewell and his two selected companions, a few hours out of Libby.

The former's allies had arranged for the escape, and they had been let loose by a guard Bridewell pretended to bribe.

The other men had been surprised at the success of the scheme, for they had not been taken into their leader's confidence, but, so far, all had gone well.

Bridewell had, indeed, gained a good deal of strength since the extra food had been secretly given him, and he felt in condition to make a real, instead of a feigned, flight. His two companions he had selected because they were stronger than the average of the prisoners, and he felt confident they would hold out.

They were timid and fearful, however, now the momentous journey was begun, and he wished it was in his power to tell them that, though they were to be pursued, no harm would be done them.

True, they were genuine "Yankees," but they had been his companions in imprisonment, and misery and misfortune draw men together by strong bonds.

Bridewell could not have harmed either one of them.

One was named Peters; the other, O'Brien.

At a certain point, according to directions given the leader, they were to find horses awaiting them, but in such a way that, to keep his companions ignorant, they were to seem to steal them.

After that their way would be comparatively easy, if not wholly safe.

Before reaching the horses, however, they had a hard journey before them; it seemed to Bridewell that the Confederate leaders were putting him to a good deal of trouble and hardship to make the escape seem real to Peters and O'Brien; but he accepted it as philosophically as possible.

They were hurrying along this road before mentioned when a human form suddenly appeared in the way just ahead, and they saw a tall man who stopped and looked at them with evident suspicion.

"Hello!" he said; "who the dickens are you?"

"Can't you see who we are?" demanded Bridewell, assuming a surly air and trying to pass.

"No, I can't see, but that's just what I want to do," the man replied, stubbornly blocking the way.

"You had better mind your own business," said Bridewell, assuming, this time, an appearance of flippant disdain.

"My business just now is to see who you are."

"Leave us alone, or you'll learn to your cost."

"By the eternal! I'll be shot if I don't believe you have on Yankee uniforms! You are escaped prisoners, just as I thought——"

Bridewell had raised one hand, but O'Brien was ahead of him. The Irishman had felt a loose stone at his feet, and he suddenly picked it up and leaped upon the unknown like a tiger. The man tried to escape but he was too late.

Down came the stone, and he fell to the ground with a groan.

"Begorra! his skull is crushed like an aigshill!" cried the Irishman. "Come on, boyees, afore the spalpeen's chums kim up!"

It was advice neither of the others were reluctant to follow, and they broke into a run and soon left the scene behind.

Bridewell, however, regretted what had occurred. The man's own stupidity had forced them to commit a deed which might cost O'Brien and Peters dearly, if, by any mischance, they were captured.

Still, they had only acted as they were to do, and he did not think of censuring the Irishman, who retained the stone and kept his eyes open, resolved to attack the next man who appeared without losing time in parley.

They soon found, however, that they had a poor companion in Peters. Either he was naturally timid, or his mind was effected by long imprisonment.

It was he who first imagined he heard the bay of a hound behind them, and the idea hovered pertinaciously in his mind.

He had heard so much about Union refugees being thus chased that the idea was always uppermost in his mind, and he proved to be the "weak sister" of the trio.

Bridewell expected pursuit in the swamp they were now nearing. It had been so arranged, and he expected to hear the bay of a bloodhound, but the Confederate civilian had promised that the animal should be kept in leash. Since their late adventure, however, Bridewell had felt a degree of uneasiness for which he could not account.

What if the man they had struck down should have friends who would take up the hunt and make trouble?

This did not seem likely in the dark, but, as before said, Bridewell was uneasy—he was even nervous.

"Hark!" said Peters, once more. "Wasn't that a dog?"

"Oh, to the divil wid your fancies!" cried O'Brien. "There isn't a sound or a bark. Begorra, if you'll use your legs more an' your head less you'll be more av an ornament to society. Run, you spalpeen, an' I'll do yer thinkin' for yez."

"I'm sure it was a dog," persisted poor Peters.

"Divil a dog have I heard, an' me ears are chuned for that sort av music all the time. Rest aisy, ould chap."

"Yes, don't borrow trouble," added Bridewell.

It was good advice, but Peters was not in condition to accept it philosophically.

They had fairly entered the swamp, though still pursuing the road.

This ran along the low territory, as Bridewell had been told it did, and was hemmed in with trees and bushes which made the place strangely dark.

Now and then they ran off the track, or would have done so had not the thick underbrush at once stopped them.

"Begorra, it's lucky the road is here," said O'Brien. "Even a cat couldn't git through the bushes."

"And I suspect every step outside this road would be liable to land us in the mud," added Bridewell.

"Right ye be. Ye'll observe this is a corduroy road, or whativer they call it, wid logs laid down to make it salid."

Bridewell had been told that the swamp was impassable except along the road; there were bogs which would take a man into the mud and never let him out; and he knew the country as well as the Irishman guessed it.

"Hark!" cried Peters.

"What now?"

"'Tis the hound at last!"

"Nonsense!"

"Ha! did you hear that?"

This time there was no disputing the scared fellow—the bay of a hound was surely borne to their ears by the night wind.

O'Brien uttered a furious ejaculation, and even Bridewell pretended to be affected, though he secretly smiled.

He was annoyed that Peters, who had been a good soldier, should so weaken now, and he was not wholly sorry that the fellow should be frightened by a hound in leash.

"We are dead men!" cried Peters.

"Mebbe ye be, but I'm a moighty lively corpse," retorted O'Brien. "I have this stone still in me hand, an' I reckon it will serve a hound as well as a man, begorra."

"What can we do against those brutes?"

"Fight!" said Bridewell, curtly.

"And be torn down?"

"Not by wan dog," assented O'Brien.

"There are two; I hear their bays distinctly."

"It'll be nayther 'bay' nor lake whin I land the divil," retorted the Irishman, making a pun which did him honor under the circumstances.

Bridewell found it necessary to console Peters all that he could, and he strongly asserted his belief that the hounds were in leash, and would be kept so, since the road was a straight one. This argument, however, led Peters to advise taking to the swamp, and the others found a good deal of difficulty in persuading him to give up the idea.

All this while they were running forward, but the violent exercise began to tell on their by-no-means-strong system, while it was just as clear that the hounds were every minute gaining.

Peters grew so alarmed that the kind-hearted Irishman gave him his arm; but even this did not seem to help matters much.

Even Bridewell grew alarmed. Why were his allies making so hot a pursuit?

With any degree of common sense they ought to see that they would utterly tire out the feeble fugitives, and how would the awkward matter be arranged if they actually overtook them?

Suddenly a startling idea occurred to Bridewell.

Were not the pursuing hounds running free, instead of in leash?

Why he thought so cannot be told, for, though a Virginian, he did not know enough about hounds to determine so fine a point; but, once conceived, the idea gained strength.

Then came a supplementary one, equally startling.

He remembered the unknown man they had struck down.

He knew, too, that even poor people surround themselves with dogs in the South. Might it not be, had the fallen man had friends near at hand; that he was soon after found, and dogs then put on the track by outside parties?

In brief, was not this hot pursuit entirely distinct from the one he had reason to expect?

The possibility that it had given him a feeling of momentary despair, for they were without actual weapons, and O'Brien was for the time the coolest man of the three.

"Yez had better foind a stone or a club," the latter advised. "We've got to foight them devils, an' we may well be ready for them. Wid this stone I'll agray ter knock the brains out one, an' I don't think there are more thin two."

Bridewell was about to mention the difficulty of finding what they desired when he nearly fell over some loose object. Picking it up, he found that he had a stout club, and his courage at once returned.

"We have got to fight them, sure enough," he said, "and I suggest that we turn at once and get back some of our wind and strength before the struggle comes."

"Oi'm wid you," returned the Irishman.

Peters demurred and urged continued flight, but the others knew they were right and would not yield. They turned and stood breathing heavily, while Peters stood behind them, groaning audibly, and seeming wholly upset.

"You an' Oi must do it alone," said O'Brien, clinching his stone tightly.

"I'm afraid so."

"If dhere's only two, we may pull through. Oi'm good fur wan, anyhow."

"We will fight like fiends."

"Roight ye be!" was the sturdy reply.

The dogs by this time were very near. Their bay, always of a mournful inflection, now seemed terribly like a death-cry to the imperiled men, and Bridewell heard the Irishman grate his teeth in his excess of emotion.

But both were filled with desperate resolution.

Nearer came the hounds. It was clear there were but two, and the fugitives grew more hopeful. If the masters of the dogs were not at hand there was yet hope.

Still nearer, and then the patter of their feet was heard.

The fugitives crouched low, grasping their rude weapons.

Then the darkness seemed to part, as it were, and too long, lithe bodies shot into view.

The crisis was at hand.

As though by common agreement, each dog selected his man of the two nearest, and sprang forward to do their work.

Bridewell marked his foe well and struck out with all his strength with the club. It

was poorly aimed, however, and missed his head. It struck his shoulder and the brute uttered a yelp of pain. The bones had cracked like glass before the blow.

But the hound was game to the last.

With only a momentary warning he sprang forward, and his rush knocked Bridewell over. Had the dog been in good condition he would have ended it then, but his broken shoulder made him slow to act.

Bridewell rolled quickly away and then gained one knee before the bloodhound could turn. Then, with all his force, he struck again—struck with terrible force, considering his condition—and the dog fell with a crushed head.

But just as this occurred a loud voice sounded from the darkness.

"Hyar they be; Come on! Shoot the infernal Yankees through the heart!"

CHAPTER XIII.

"I AM BETRAYED!"

Bridewell's blood grew cold, or seemed to, and he turned hurriedly to his companions. How were they faring with the second bloodhound?

O'Brien, with the stone firmly grasped, had made an effort to beat down the dog at his first rush, but he did not succeed so well as he had done with the man. The brute cleverly evaded the blow, and leaping upon the Irishman, bore him down. His chances looked desperate, but help came in an unexpected way.

The gravity of the situation—the element of deadly peril—stirred Peters to a sort of fierce desperation. He sprung forward, and, just as the hound's jaws were about to close upon his comrade's neck, grasped the animal by his throat, tore him away, and actually began an attempt to strangle him.

Whether he would have succeeded will never be known. O'Brien had not lost courage for a moment, and he rushed forward to do his share. The stone in his hand arose, then fell with a heavy thud, and the dog yelped once and was dead.

It was at this moment that the hostile voice arose with the words with which we closed the previous chapter.

The fugitives could not fail to understand it. The masters of the dogs were at near, and a fresh peril was at hand. Strangely enough, it was Peters who first found the power of speech.

"Run!" he exclaimed, in a firm, but low voice.

He merely expressed what was in the mind of each, and as one man they turned and started away.

"There they go! Fire! fire!'

Again the unknown's voice arose, but almost as an echo sounded that of Bridewell.

"Drop! Fall flat!"

Down went the three.

Crack, crack, crack!

It was an irregular volley, but how many weapons spoke they could not tell—probably no more than half a dozen. And every bullet whistled wide above them.

"Up, and away!"

Bidwell spoke with the coolness of a machine, and they arose and again began running with mingled speed and caution.

"Don't see them anywhere," said the unknown; "reckon they are all down. Pick the cannon up, men!"

"Bedad, an' ef yez pick dhis cannon up roight away. Oi'm moighty mistaken," muttered O'Brien, as they sped away.

Desperation gave them new strength, and they sped along the road at a good pace. Peters no longer complained or faltered.

He was not a coward; His temporary weakness of courage arose from weakness of mind and body, engendered by the fatal touch of life at Libby, and he was once more himself.

Several rods had been traversed before they heard further sounds of pursuit, but they came ultimately, and it was clear the fugitives must use due care.

Had they been strong and well they would not have feared for the result, but it was a painful fact that men just out of Libby were not in condition to cope with other men in a foot-race, or otherwise.

Bridewell realized this. He was sure, too, that the men in the rear were not the pursuers he had expected, but a separate gang from whom no mercy could be expected, and he cudgeled his brains for means of relief.

O'Brien seemed to have been doing the same thing.

"Begorra, we've got to change the programme, somehow. They'll run us down as sure as pr'aching."

"We must take to the swamp," said Peters.

"And get mired?" questioned Bridewell.

"As well that as to be shot."

"Oi'm not sure but ye're roight," O'Brien said.

Bridewell hesitated, but he heard the men in pursuit, and it was plain that they would be overtaken very soon. He was about to agree to the proposition when the Irishman spoke suddenly.

"By me soul, Oi'm not going to run loike a shape," was the sturdy declaration. "Wid the weapons we have in hand we are the aquils o' any Secesh afoot, bedad! and I propose we ambush ourselves by the way, an' thin attack them for luck an' heads when they come up."

The suggestion startled both the other men for a moment, for they were ill-fitted for a fight against odds. Still, the more they thought of it the less they were inclined to demur. To keep on tamely was sure capture, or death; to take to the treacherous footing of the swamp meant the same thing a little later, for when it was known that runaways were there a large force would turn out to hunt them.

On the other hand, if they could overcome the pursuers, they would secure weapons—something sorely needed.

Each one of the three now had a club, and O'Brien, with his usual readiness to fight, argued that by ambushing themselves as he had suggested they could win a strong lead on the enemy before the latter could recover from the confusion of such an unexpected attack.

The more they thought of it the more they became inclined to act accordingly, and they finally paused where the darkness was intense and secreted themselves in the bushes, the Irishman on one side, and Bridewell and Peters on the other.

With their clubs firmly grasped they awaited the coming of the pursuers.

It was a painful suspense, a momentous crisis, but even Peters was as cool as ice itself. Sheer desperation gave them the firmness which would have come from the possession of proper weapons had they held any.

Nearer came the pursuers, and they could be heard cursing noisily.

"They are no soldiers," whispered Bridewell.

"They'll be clods in a moment," replied Peters, with stony composure.

Two rods away—one rod—and then but a yard.

Like human tigers the Unionists leaped from their ambush. They had seen that there were but five pursuers, and it was their great, their only hope, that each of them could knock down a man at the first attack.

The man-hunters were taken wholly by surprise. That their prey would turn at bay had not occurred to them, and though each held a rifle they had no time to turn them as the half maddened fugitives came at them in the narrow road.

There were several thuds from heavy blows, and three of the enemy went down.

The other two, a good deal startled, tried to meet the danger, but the desperate fugitives gave them little time. Peters, adopting the same tactics he had used on the dog, sprang in under the rifle the pursuer tried to level and graped the man by the throat.

O'Brien broke his club short off against the second man's rifle, and then seized that weapon and the two began a fierce struggle for its possession.

Bridewell, knowing the Irishman was the strongest physically of the three, gave his help to Peters, and knocked down the man that novel fighter had by the throat.

Just then, however, one of those first prostrated seized him by the legs, pulling him down. Another moment and they were rolling over and over on the muddy ground.

Peters saw that O'Brien was getting the worst of it in his fight for the gun, and he sprang to his aid. Just then, however, both men disappeared through the bushes and a loud splash told the sort of landing they found.

One of the enemy was struggling up, but Peters seized a rifle and knocked him back again with a terrific blow.

Bridewell, fighting desperately, managed to get on top his man, and Peters finished him up with another blow.

But the enemy were hard to keep down. Bridewell saw a rifle pointing at Peters' back, and he dashed forward with such impetuosity that the fellow who held it, yielding to the collision, was knocked through the bushes as though struck by a battering ram.

Another loud splash followed.

Then the two fugitives found themselves standing alone, panting but victorious.

"The weapons!" exclaimed Bridewell. "Let us make sure of them while we can."

The idea was acted on. It was found that the larger firearms were all rifles, and each man had a small supply of ammunition.

Three revolvers and thirteen cartridges, besides their present loading, were also found.

At that one point a man emerged from the bushes.

"Another!" exclaimed Peters. "Brain him——"

"Hould on!" replied a familiar voice. "It's mesilf ye see, an' divil a brainin' do I need. Better save all the brains we have, begorra!"

It was O'Brien, wet and muddy, but victorious.

"Secure the weapons, and then let us get away. These fellows are only stunned, and we shall have more fighting if we stay," said Bridewell.

The advice was good, and it was acted upon. The two superfluous rifles were thrown far into the swamp.

Then, with the other weapons, the fugitives resumed their way. They were much encourged.

Where they had before been unarmed, each now had a rifle, a revolver and a knife, and a fair supply of ammunition. Their spirits went up accordingly.

Bridewell knew he had committed no breach of faith in this fight.

None of the men had been Confederate soldiers; on the contrary, their weapons, dress, etc., clearly showed that they were ordinary hunters, or, at least, passing as such. He had supposed that all able bodied Southerners were in the army in 1863, but why these fellows were not, it was not his business to consider.

Escape was the prime object in his mind.

But he regretted the fight. Perhaps if it became known the Confederate leaders would doubt his loyalty, or in some way blame him—it might be hard to convince them that the fight had been forced upon the handful of fugitives.

But it had been inevitable, and he hoped for the best.

Nothing further was heard from their late antagonists, and a mile was traveled without further trouble. Peters and O'Brien were much encouraged by the possession of the weapons, and the latter, perhaps, too much so. It was his nature to like fighting as well as any other "pleasure" of life, and he would have a good deal rather fought a half-dozen Confederates, had any been met, than to avoid them.

"Bedad!" he observed, "Oi've been a prisoner in that ould hole av a Libby for a year, an' I want jest wan good crack at thim wid convanyant weapons in me hands."

But Bridewell aspired for nothing of the kind. He was anxious to get beyond the Confederate region without further trouble. As for the swamp, he knew it must be about passed, and he looked eagerly for the opening.

Then, according to arrangement, he would soon be in possession of horses.

The opening came in due time. They emerged from the wood, and as the darkness was far less marked, he saw a house standing to the left of the road. Its position left no doubt but it was the one to which he had been directed, and in the stable of which he was to find the coveted animals.

Peters suggested that they pass it as quickly as possible, but Bridewell pretended to be in deep thought, and then suddenly stopped and said:

"Boys, we ought not to pass here without seeing if there are horses in that stable."

"Devil a horse will ye foind," said O'Brien. "Ain't the Southern chivalry in nade ov all the horses their blissed states will hould? Ivery wan av them is in the army."

This was good logic, on common ground, but it did not move Bridewell, who had reason to think otherwise.

"We will see, anyhow," he replied.

"And get shot, maybe," said Peters.

"Rubbish! Shall such an obstacle stand in our way? Do you remember the weary miles between us and the Union lines?"

"Ye're roight," as yez commonly be," said the Irishman. "If there's hoof or hide in

the sthable, begorra we'll take thim in out the wet."

Peters remonstrated no more, and they cautiously advanced toward the stable.

The hour was late and no light was visible from the house—indeed, there was nothing to show that there was a living creature besides themselves within a mile of the place—so there really seemed to be but little danger.

They reached the stable and opened the door, which yielded readily to their hands, and Bridewell crossed the threshold. But as he did so there was a flash and report just ahead of him—plainly from a revolver—and he fell back in O'Brien's arms.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, "I am betrayed!"

His singular remark was followed by another report, and the Irishman felt a stinging sensation in his arm.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DESPERATE DASH FOR LIFE.

O'Brien supposed that Bridewell was badly, if not fatally shot, but the sequel proved that the latter was not touched. He had only fallen because, as he recoiled from the unexpected shot, his foot struck the beam which seemed as a threshold, thus throwing him into his companion's arms.

He soon proved that he was a very lively man still.

The supposed discovery of treachery stung him to a fury, and he jerked out his revolver and sprang recklessly forward. The flash of the second shot guided him, and he held his weapon straight forward and pulled the trigger.

There was a flash—a groan—a heavy fall—and then Bedlam seemed let loose.

Other flashes occurred just in front, and it seemed as though a whole regiment had fired. Really, this was because the place was so low, narrow and confined, making the reports sound unnaturally loud. Not more than six men had fired.

These six, however, had been enough to have silenced all our friends forever, had it not been for their presence of mind. As during the flight in the swamp, they flung themselves flat and all the lead went whizzing over them.

But the affair was not over. O'Brien's fighting blood was in a ferment; Bridewell was wild at the treachery shown, and resolved to have the horses if any were there, and Peters joined in because he forgot that retreat was possible—believing that his life depended on fighting, he went in with a will.

The three leaped up and plunged recklessly forward, firing as they went. They were masters of the situation quicker even than they had dared hope. A few shots were returned, but all went well, and they heard the enemy scampering away.

One other discovery they had made. There were stalled horses before them, and at a word from Bridewell each sprang for an animal. There was no time to look for saddles or other accoutrements, and they gave no heed to them. Slashing clear the leather straps by which the frightened horses were tied, they backed them out of the stalls and from the stable.

Once there, they sprang to the bare backs and darted away without a shade of delay.

As they went, three or four rifles cracked behind them, but the bullets went wild and O'Brien turned and waved his ragged cap defiantly.

"Shoot away, an' be blamed to yez, ye divil's own chickens. We've got the hosses!"

There was unanswerable truth in the last assertion, but how long they would keep them was not so clear. Even Bridewell was all at fault, and he had gloomy forebodings as regarded the future. He had received what seemed conclusive evidence that he was "betrayed," as he had expressed it, and he knew pretty clearly where to place the blame.

It was not upon the Confederate civilian. That man he knew was above such a paltry trick, as the reader would agree were we to make his name public in this chronicle.

But Bridewell knew, and he hoped to one day bring the culpable party to the throne of vengeance, if not of strict justice. Still he might not live to do it. If he was already "betrayed," and his life sought, there was no knowing what other dangers he would encounter on his way to the Potomac.

The fugitives reached the road and turned north, and then had a chance to look to their situation for the first time. Each horse had on a bridle, and when the fragment of the useless halters, which had been slipped on over the bridles, had been thrown away, they had the usual facilities for managing their animals.

The want of saddles would not trouble them at once, though such things are very useful in a long ride.

Through all this exciting occurrence they had retained their weapons in full, and they felt an elation as they swept along the road which even the prospect of speedy pursuit could not dampen.

"By me life, it was lucky ye insisted on lookin' into the stable," O'Brien observed, as he run his hand along his horse's ribs to see how much flesh the animal bore, and found that part satisfactory.

"It's odd the bridles were on," added Peters.

"We clearly ran into a batch o' sojers," explained the Irishman. "Ye'll remimber dhe halters were on over dhe bridles, which shows that it was only a brief halt de Secesh was makin'. Bedad! we broke up their little campmeetin' in double-quick toime!"

"I notice, Spencer," (the reader will remember it was by this name Bridewell had been known in Libby) "that you cried out: 'I am betrayed!' when the first shot was fired. What did you mean by that? I hope you didn't mean that we had betrayed you?" inquired Peters.

Bridewell winked twice in quick succession, and then coolly answered:

"Not at all, Peters. Heaven forbid that I should suspect my comrades in misfortune. No, no, Peters; there was nothing of the kind. 'I am betrayed!' Did I really say that? I don't know why I should, and it must be you misunderstood me, or, in my confusion, I may have said that instead of what I meant—if you know what I did mean?"

"Begorra, it's not worth whoile to inquire," said the Irishman. "I niver stop to choose me wurruds whin I am in battle an' me foightin' blood is up. I go in loike a Kilkenny cat thin, bedad; though whin dhe foight is over, I choose me wurruds wid an oye open only to ilegance, niver usin' a blissed syllable widout first askin' me mental silf if Daniel Webster, dhe great dictionary man, w'u'd approve av me stoyle."

Further discussion on the point ceased, as a rattling of hoofs down the road told that some one was in pursuit.

"It is now a test of horse-flesh," said Bridewell, coolly. "How are you two mounted?"

"If me judgment serves me roight, me steed is a jewel," O'Brien asserted.

"The same here," added Peters.

"Then let us hope for the best. We are making good time, and our horses go without limp or stumble. If their bottom is good, we stand a fair chance of pulling through, though the pursuit is hot."

"Let them come on. We are armed!" retorted Peters.

In fact their situation had greatly improved since starting. They now had weapons and horses, all of which had been secured more through good luck and heroism than by the agreement with the Confederate civilian. But they had either killed something like half a dozen men, or placed them *hors du combat*, which was also outside of the agreement, and Bridewell had a fear that this slaughter might prove to be a boomerang, recoiling on themselves.

His fears were necessarily kept to himself, however.

It soon became clear that the pursuit was to be a serious matter. Good as were the horses the fugitives rode, those behind them were capable of holding their own, at the least calculation. The pursuers were so near—they were within musket-shot, in fact, and the fusilade would probably have been lively only for the darkness—that they could hear them urge on their animals with both word and blow.

Bridewell's directions had been full, and included a turn to the left here, and one to the right there, but, going at full speed, he was greatly troubled to decide when each particular point was reached; while his anxiety on these points, and certain strange variations from what seemed the best course, so disturbed his companions that he adopted the expedient of telling them he was now on ground partly familiar—hence, his course.

But the pursuit did not go to their liking.

The enemy were slowly cutting down their lead despite their best endeavors.

"We've got to fight again," said Peters, somewhat gloomily.

"It looks like it, by me soul," O'Brien agreed.

"The odds are against us," argued Bridewell.

"So is everything else, except our pluck, but we will show them that is A 1. Bedad, I hail from the Sixth Ward, New York City, and don't allow any man to show a bolder front than meself. Say the word, boys, and we'll turn and wipe the ground wid the spalpeens."

"Not until it's absolutely necessary," said Bridewell.

"Just as ye say, you're cap'n here, and I always obey me superior officers."

"What's that ahead?" suddenly asked Peters.

"Where?"

"It's a light. Yes, and there are more. We are coming to a village. That's bad."

O'Brien echoed the last statement, but Bridewell's face cleared. He had been looking for the village, and had began to fear they had passed it. Now, provided it was the proper one, he knew they were going as they should go.

Some surprise was expressed because the lights were still burning at that hour—it must have been at least two o'clock—but as they could see only three or four there seemed to be no good reason why they should pay any attention to them. So they went on at full speed.

They reached the edge of the village and dashed down the narrow street. It was dark, as well as narrow, for huge shade trees stood on both sides, shutting out all view except dead ahead.

Toward this point Bridewell was looking eagerly. If it were indeed the village they sought their direct course would soon be stopped. At a certain point the street turned sharply to the east, while dead ahead was a row of houses, at the rear of which flowed a good-sized river.

Suddenly he straightened in his saddle.

"We're all right, boys."

"How so?"

"I know this village—we are going all right."

"Begorra, I am glad if there's a light in the east," said O'Brien, with a weary sigh.

They swept around the bend, still riding in the tree-shaded avenue. Just beyond there ought to be a square, where they would again turn to the north, cross the river on a bridge and leave the village.

Forward they swept, and then O'Brien's "light in the east" appeared with a vengeance.

They saw the square, and they saw at least a score of lights, big and little, one being a huge oil-lantern which swung from a rod, something like those used by street laborers, and burned furiously; and by this glow they saw that the square was alive with humanity—not literally full, but altogether too full for their liking.

On a box stood a man who was making some sort of a speech to the crowd, and even then they could see that he was in a Confederate uniform; while just beyond they saw a glitter which it needed no great wisdom to show came from the muskets of soldiers.

Simultaneously the fugitives reined in their horses, but a clatter behind them told that the pursuers were close at hand.

They were between two hostile parties.

At this gloomy outlook even O'Brien wavered for a moment, but Bridewell's clear mind grasped the whole situation at once.

"There is only one chance," he said, hurriedly. "We must dash through the square!"

He had expected some opposition, but the fact was, his companions were stirred to a pitch of reckless and desperate daring where they would have charged Lee's whole army.

They echoed his words promptly.

"Come on, then! Here we go!"

They did go! With heel and hand they spurred up their horses to a pitch of wildness, and the three animals sprang away at full speed. Their hoofs clattered loudly on the hard soil, but, praise to good fortune, the orator made so much more noise that he drowned the sound for awhile.

Next, the crowd broke into a cheer, and the madly speeding men from Libby were in their very midst before they were seen.

Some of the people were almost ridden down, and then they began to hustle for safety. No fear from the ordinary people. But what of the soldiers?

Had such a thing been possible they would have avoided them. It was not, so the three gallant fellows sped forward like Centaurs. Concealment was no longer possible, and O'Brien began to yell like a maniac; the other two joined in lustily.

For a moment the people, soldiers and all,

thought that veritable demons were among them, and they vied with each other in trying to get out of the way, but, as is nearly always the case when a crowd makes a wild rush, they come to grief—men, women and children fell over each other and rolled about in helpless confusion, getting so mixed up that nobody knew which hand or foot of the knot belonged to him.

The orator, who, a moment before, had been stating he would sweep every Yankee out of the South on the dead run if he were at the head of the nation, had leaped from his box with such haste that he alighted on a man's shoulders and then fell over and came down wrapped in a woman's shawl; and for a moment he had been as badly frightened as any one there, but he braced up, and gaining his feet, thundered out an order to his soldiers as heroically as though he knew not the name of fear.

In the meanwhile, however, the men from Libby had made the most of their time and were already thundering out of the square.

The officer was about to order a pursuit when he saw three or four other men following the first party. His resolution was at once taken. These wild roysterers, at least, should not escape.

He gave the customary orders and his soldiers flung up their muskets, covered the second party and fired. There was a roar, and all the men used as targets went down.

"Reckon we've got them, anyhow," said the Confederate leader, pompously. "Let's see what manner of fish or fowl we've landed."

He went foward, while some of his soldiers bore lights. They found four men dead, shot through and through, and everyone wore the gray uniform of rebeldom.

The singularly bright-witted officer had slaughtered, not his own soldiers, but those who had upheld the same flag—and every pursuer of the men from Libby was dead.

Over the bridge clattered the gallant three.

"I don't see any pursuers," said Bridewell.

"Can it be they were shot by the others?" asked Peters.

"Begorra, there's solid chunks o' wisdom in the oidea."

"You are right," added Bridewell, "and my hopes burn anew. If we meet with no new danger, there is yet a chance. Ride on, boys, and let us hope for the best."

CHAPTER XV.

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS.

Washington!

The national capital was astir with human life, and the sun looked down on the truly beautiful city of the Potomac with a kindly eye. Pennsylvania avenue, that great street which cuts the city through its center like a great artery, was filled with people who moved quickly on business intent, and sauntered with the easy pace of one who is only "killing time."

It's a grand avenue. Standing at a point, for instance, near the St. James Hotel, one sees the smooth, long street stretching either way, prodigiously broad from curb to curb, and giving room for thrice the business traffic Washington has ever enjoyed.

Back on a gentle rise of land stands the Capitol, that massive building which is the pride of the nation; the building, whose floor has been trod by more distinguished feet than even the most vivid imagination would readily calculate. High, deep, wide, long and massive, the great edifice looks down upon the city and lanes, and then away to the surrounding country, as though to say:

"Be of good cheer! I am with you—I, the treasury of liberty, the bulwark of the nation, the guardian of the people!"

On this day before referred to, two men were passing along Pennsylvania avenue, They had come from the direction of the white house and had just passed the St. Mare Hotel.

One of the two is no stranger to us; we have seen him before. We have seen him as the emaciated, ragged prisoner imploring release from Libby, and as the fugitive hastened Northward with Peters and O'Brien. At last he is in the capital, well dressed, and, apparently, well-fed, for he has recovered much of his old-time form. He is plainly dressed in citizen's clothing.

He and his companion were talking lightly, but this was brought to a halt as a lady suddenly sprang in front of Bridewell and grasped his hand.

"Oh! Walter, Walter!" she exclaimed, "thank God! thank God! I thought you were dead, but I see you once more."

The man from Libby reeled back and looked at her in what seemed a startled manner. There was no light of recognition on his face, and, noticing that he really seemed alarmed, his former companion surmised that he believed the woman to be crazy.

Yet, she had no appearance of mental derangement. She was young, handsome, refined looking, and her face was now eloquent with joy.

"Dear husband! this is a glad surprise," she added, as Bridewell remained silent.

But now his lips moved—he was so pale that even those lips were white—and he feebly muttered:

"Excuse me, but I think you are mistaken. Whom do you think I am?"

She looked surprised, and then laughed a little.

"Who? she echoed. "Now, you are laughing at me, Walter. You want to test my memory, but so poor a jest will not avail you now. Do you suppose a true woman can forget her husband in two short years? You are Walter Spencer, and I am your wife!"

Gridley, Bridewell's companion, smiled a little, but the man from Libby answered gravely, though calmly:

"I regret your disappointment, madam, but I am not he for whom you mistake me. My name is Thorbert, and I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance."

The bright smile vanished from her face; she looked bewildered for a moment, and then returned to the attack resolutely.

"Walter, what's the matter? Don't you know me, Glendora? Is—is there anything wrong?"

She looked appealingly at Gridley, as though she feared the mind of the man she claimed as her husband was shaken, but he said nothing to help her.

"My dear lady," replied Bridewell—or Thorbert, as he now seemed to call himself—"I assure you there is a mistake. You are deceived by a fancied resemblance. I do not know the Walter Spencer to whom you allude, though I would be glad to help you if I could."

Glendora looked at him with tears in her large eyes.

"Oh! Walter!" she exclaimed

"What can I do to convince you?" asked Thorbert, looking nervously at the passing people, fearful that their attention would be drawn to the scene. "Here, let me give you my address. Call at that place to-morrow at ten A. M., and I will prove to your satisfaction that I am plain John Thorbert, and nobody else. At present, I lack the time to pause here."

"That is a fact," Gridley agreed.

Glendora seemed to droop like a stricken flower—as Gridley afterward said, it seemed as though he could look into her dusky eyes and see sorrow, suffering and a graveyard of human hopes.

"I thought you were lost at Bull Run," she said, not persistently, but with a simple faith in her supposed recognition of her husband.

"We are all liable to be mistaken, madam, and yours is not an uncommon case. Come to my address, however, and I will prove that I am John Thorbert, and perhaps I can help you to find your husband. Who knows? Now, business calls me away. Good-day."

He lifted his hat and walked on. Glendora looked after him for a moment, and then pursued her way with a heavy sigh. The possibility of an error had gained some ground with her, but when she had gone a few rods, she discarded it as impossible, and turned back.

"I know it was Walter, and I will find him and not lose sight of him again. He is deranged—he must—and I will now prove my loyalty."

But when she looked for him she found him not. He had in some way disappeared from her sight.

She was still standing irresolutely when a hand was laid on her arm. She turned and saw Barbara Deane.

"Good afternoon, Glendora. Why, how pale and troubled you look. Is there anything wrong?"

"Barbara, I have seen Walter!"

Miss Deane started.

"Is he out of prison?"

Glendora stamped her foot passionately.

"Why will you persist in calling that man in prison Walter Spencer? It's not his name. Could it be Walter, when he is a convicted spy and traitor? No; his name is Bridewell, even though he was once on General Warfield's staff."

"Glendora!" began Barbara, warmly, and then her burst of temper ended, and she sadly added: "You should not call him such harsh names. Remember that I love him!"

"Forgive me, Barbara; I was wrong, very wrong. In my own trouble, I forgot yours. But, alas! I am miserable. I have seen the real Walter Spencer, and he declared he did not know me, and that his name was something else. What means all this terrible mystery?"

Barbara's pitying look indicated that she believed her companion, and so she did. She believed the whole world mad, or united in trying to ruin and crush her chosen husband, Warfield's ex-staff-officer.

Soon after Gettysburg the mysterious major, whom we will continue to call Walter Spencer until we learn who he really is, was removed to Washington. By the artifice of introducing Colonel Bredwick to the jail, General Meade had satisfied himself that the major was guilty of all charged against him, and he sent him to the capital for trial.

There other officers and officials found themselves all at sea. The case was the most remarkable of any they had ever met with.

The major seemed clearly proven a traitor and a spy, but, to counteract all this, was his splendid service in the army, where he had won the soubriquet of the "Firebrand of the Potomac."

Strangest of all was the Gettysburg affair. The prison door had carelessly been left open; the major walked out, and might have escaped to Lee's army, but, instead, he joined the Union army, and fought almost inhmanly, leading a decisive charge and winning great glory; and then he returned to the jail and ordered the negligent guards to lock him in again.

How could such a man be a traitor?

When all these facts had been laid before President Lincoln he selected five eminent surgeons and ordered them to examine the man's mental condition, as Meade had done. Again came the verdict that the major was perfectly sane, and the puzzle grew more complicated.

A month had passed since the prisoner was taken to Washington, but he had not been brought to trial.

Barbara's faith in her lover had never wavered, and, with Adam for a guard, she had followed him to Washington and done what she could for him.

Glendora Marchmont was also there, and, though the two girls had such radically different views, they had become quite good friends.

With this explanation, let us follow Thorbert and Gridley. They had barely left Glendora when the former proposed that they take a cab, and, without waiting for an answer, he walked to one which stood by the curb and entered. As he had only a few minutes been extolling walking as a beneficial exercise, Gridley was somewhat surprised, but he made no comments.

Thorbert leaned back in the vehicle as it rolled away and seemed wholly at his ease.

"Odd encounter, that was," he observed, carelessly.

"Very," was the dry reply.

"That was the second time I've been mistaken for a long-lost husband in the week. We single men actually stand in danger from lone widows."

"You seem to, at any rate."

"Exactly. Who was it that interesting lady mistook me for?—Walter Spencer? Ay, that was it. Well, I never heard the name before. Do you suppose she ever did?"

"Yes," replied Gridley, gravely. "The poor woman seemed to me to be in sore trouble, and very much in earnest. I tell you, Thorbert, this war makes many a bleeding heart."

"You are right," quickly replied the man from Libby, and then he sighed heavily.

Silence reigned for awhile as the cab rolled along the street, and then Thorbert, who had been thinking deeply, suddenly aroused.

"Are you going with me to the examination, Gridley?"

"What examination?"

"Well, I really don't know, but General Wisely is about to give a preliminary examination to some fellow—Jones, Brown or Robinson, or whoever he is, who is charged with treason and other high misdeanors. He sent me an invitation to drop in, and as it will serve to kill time for awhile, I am going."

"Will they admit me?"

"If you go with me, yes. Come on, and

see the fun—that is, there may be fun for us, though I doubt if the accused gets much pleasure out of it. It seems he was an officer on General Warfield's staff, and that he used his opportunity to act as a spy for the South. If such is the case, let us devoutly hope he will yet stretch a rope. Such a man deserves no mercy."

CHAPTER XVI.

"VILLAIN, YOU ARE ROBERT BRIDEWELL."

The cab took Thorbert and Gridley directly to the place where the spy was to have his preliminary examination. They found the room filled with legal and military lights who need not be named here. Enough to say that that candid and high-principled man, General Wisely, was to have charge of the matter, and that an eminent lawyer, whom we will call Blackstone, was to appear for the accused.

Since his coming to Washington the man from Libby had gained the good-will of many noted people—even of President Lincoln—and on the present occasion he and Gridley were given seats near the long table by General Wisely.

Several vacant chairs were there, one of which was reserved for the prisoner, who had not been brought in as yet.

There was a little bustle about the table, however, as the doors opened and he appeared, leaning on the arm of Mr. Blackstone. Of course, the reader has perceived that the accused was Major Spencer, late of General Warfield's staff.

He had laid aside his uniform and adopted plain citizen's garments, and, though he looked less imposing, he had the appearance of being a thorough gentlemen, in the usual sense of the word, and a manly and handsome one at that.

He betrayed no emotion at the sight of the gathering which was to work the first real step in his trial for a dark crime, but, arm in arm with Blackstone, proceeded to the seat set apart for him. He then ran his gaze along the line of faces, as there were some there who knew and were not ashamed to recognized him, he nodded with a friendly, easy smile in response to each salutation.

This remarkable coolness had never wavered from the first moment of his arrest.

Consequently, no one was surprised for what followed.

As his roving glance reached the face of Mr. Thorbert, the man from Libby, it suddenly became fixed, and an expression of the most complete astonishment overspread his face. What was there in the face to thus move him? Thorbert was calm and at his ease.

Suddenly the major sprung to his feet.

"General Wisely," he exclaimed, "you have accused me of a vile crime, and tried to fasten on me an identity not my own. The time has now come for me to prove a part of my innocence. The wretch for whom you have mistaken me is now in this room—he sits there!"

And he leveled one finger full at Thorbert.

Every one was surprised and startled. The major's manner was full of suppressed vehemence, but still calm enough for it to carry great weight, and as he thus made the accusation point-blank, all looked at Thorbert. That accusing finger could not indicate any one else.

Thorbert looked first at the major and then along the line of faces, and seemed very much bewildered.

"Eh?" he said. "What is it? What does all this mean? Is it a joke on me?"

"Villain!" cried Major Spencer, in a thrilling voice, "you cannot bluff me thus. You are Robert Bridewell!"

The accusation brought fresh surprise to the speechless spectators but Thorbert, after a brief pause, and an evident struggle with his bewilderment, smiled composedly.

"I don't know Robert Bridewell from a brick house," he said, good-humoredly, "but I can safely assert that I am not he. My name is Thorbert—John Thorbert."

"It's false!" retorted the major, strongly, but far from violently. "You are Bridewell, a traitorous Virginian, one of the original secessionists, and a rebel officer. I now see clearly from whence springs the plot against me, but I did not think you would be bold enough to venture into my sight. General Wisely, I accuse that man of being a rebel officer, and in some way of being responsible for the foul charges against me."

Thorbert put out one hand deprecatingly.

"My dear sir, you are greatly mistaken. I am not your accuser. I know nothing to your harm. I never saw you before this occasion in my life. As for the charges brought against you, I do not know what they are, and I can prove that two weeks ago I was an inmate of Libby Prison, where I was held for over a year."

"It's false!" retorted the major. "You are Robert Bridewell!"

"Major Spencer," said General Wisely, "I beg that you will not make such a scene here. I am myself acquainted with Mr. Thorbert, and I know his statement is a literal fact."

"Robert Bridewell," continued the major, "look at me."

"I see you, sir," Thorbert courteously replied.

"You and I are old enemies. We have known each other all our lives. We played together as children; we were bitter foes as men. Look at me and deny, if you can, that I am Walter Spencer."

"Major," was the earnest reply, "I deny nothing of the kind. Believe me, I am not here as your enemy; I am not your enemy at all, and I have no part in your trial. For all I know to the contrary, you are Walter Spencer, but, major, you make a great mistake in my own identity. I am named John Thorbert, not Robert Bridewell."

"It is false!" exclaimed the major, intensely, but with surprising calmness. "Your assertions avail nothing. Do I not know a rattlesnake when I see his loathsome form?"

"Major Spencer," said General Wisely, severely, "I cannot permit such language as this. I am responsible for the assertion that you are in error, and the matter must not go further. The gentleman whom you have so wronged is my acquaintance, and I shall protect him from insult."

By this time Mr. Blackstone was on his feet.

"General Wisely," he said, "I ask for an adjournment of this examination. I have faith to believe there is something more than a passing whim in this, and justice to my client demands that an opportunity be given us to test the accuracy of his statements. Believe me, sir, when I say that in my own investigation of this remarkable case I find the lives of Walter Spencer and Robert Bridwell so interwoven that the connection is not to be laughed down. Major Spencer has asserted that yonder gentleman is Bridewell. Justice, sir, demands that his statement be tested."

"So far as I am concerned, I think the idea quite proper," said Thorbert. Although I never heard of either Bridewell or Spencer until to-day, I am quite ready to show who I am."

"And I, sir," exclaimed the major, "will prove that you are Robert Bridewell!"

Thorbert smiled calmly.

"It is quite proper that you should try, sir. You certainly ought to know, if reports concerning you are correct, all about Spencer and Bridewell."

"I do know, as I shall prove," retorted the major, with a slight show of viciousness.

General Wisely at first declined to grant the request, but when Blackstone insisted strongly, the veteran decided to adjourn the hearing and attend to other business.

Accordingly, Major Spencer was led out. At the door he turned for a moment and looked at the man from Libby with a glance far from friendly. His lips moved, but he spoke no word, and then he passed through the door.

His lawyer accompanied him to his cell.

"Now, then, major, what is the inside history of this affair?" asked the perplexed attorney.

"Just this: The cloven foot shows in my persecution. Robert Bridewell has had the audacity to appear on the scene, and now I am no longer in the dark concerning the origin of the strange attack upon my honor and life. Rest assured, Bridewell is at the bottom of it all."

"But you say he is a rebel officer."

"He is—or was, up to Bull Run. Why he has ventured North I do not know."

"But General Wisely says he is acquainted with the man, and can certify to his not being Bridewell."

"The scoundrel has deceived Wisely Your best way, Blackstone, is to go directly to President Lincoln and lay the whole matter before him. He is a man who will do justice to friend and foe alike, and between the two of you the record of this secession scoundrel will be well ventilated."

"By George, your idea is a good one, and when I get a few more points from you I'll go direct to the White House."

Night!

Major Spencer's cell was off a corridor in a part of the prison where, at that time, there chanced to be but few other occupants. Along the corridor paced a single guard. Nominally, he looked after all the cells which opened off his beat; practically, he had only the major to look after.

A clock within his hearing had just struck one when there was a tapping at the inside of Spencer's door. The guard could not open it, for he had no keys, but he shoved the slide to a small opening at one side, and then a voice sounded in the cell.

"Is it you, Ditmar?"

"Yes, major."

"Give me a match, so I can get a light."

"A light? I'm afraid I'll be seen."

"No fear of that. I have hung two blankets up against the window, and if any one approaches on your side you can warn me. I promise I will not betray you. I want to write a letter."

"All right."

The soldier passed in a match.

"And, Ditmar."

"Yes, major."

"I want you to carry out another letter for me to-morrow—or this morning, rather, for it is now one. Will a greenback be a pledge that you'll take it through?"

"That it will. You deal with me like a prince, sir, and I will be true to you."

"All right. Now for the letter!"

The major retreated to his table and started a light. His lamp was left with him every night, but he was obliged to extinguished it at ten o'clock, and no matches were allowed him. Hence, his request of the guard.

Having got his light, he produced writing materials, sat down and began to write rapidly. Let us follow his course, word for word.

"WASHINGTON, August 10, 1863.

"DEAR GENERAL:—It's some time since you have received any communication from me, but this has been your (and my) misfortune, not my fau't. I am in prison, and have been for over a month. The cause of this may be briefly stated. It seems that the long-headed Yankees suspected that some one was keeping you informed in regard to army movements, and investigation directed suspicion to me. Then one of my letters to you was seized and the ruin was complete. I was seized and flung in prison. So far I have, by one expedient and another, succeeded in staving off my trial, but I can do so no longer. They have learned my true name, and a fatally strong web of evidence is prepared against me. Unless something is done, I shall swing as a spy before many days. I know very well that if you can help me, you will, so I merely report my situation. I know there are other C. S. A. agents here, but the question is, can they carry out any plan you may form. I do not know, so I leave all to your good judgment. I remain, general, your obedient servant, ROBERT RHETT BRIDEWELL.

"*To General Robert E. Lee.*"

Having finished this letter the major put it in an envelope, but left the latter blank. Then he thrust the whole into a larger envelope, addressed it to "Mrs. Arabella J. Eldridge," and again called to the guard.

"Here's the letter, Ditmar," he said. "It is to an old friend of my mother. She has not been to see me, and I fear she believes me guilty of the odious crime charged against me. This will assure her to the contrary. If you will post it in the morning, you will greatly oblige me."

"I'll do it faithfully, major."

"Of course, you will not let any one know of the occurrence. It would hurt both of us."

"I know it, major, and I'll keep it dark."

"Very well. Here is a greenback."

The guard received it eagerly, thanked the donor, put both letter and money away, and then resumed his pacing.

The major blew out the light, removed the blankets from the window and again went to bed.

"That is done," he said. "Probably I could have trusted Ditmar before, but if the letter went into hostile hands I would have been ruined. "Now, it will go its way, and I can await the result calmly. Perhaps Lee will not be able to do anything for me, but I have an inward conviction that I was not born to be hanged. Perhaps I shall yet wield my sword for the beloved South. Who knows?"

CHAPTER XVII.

"I SOLEMNLY DECLARE I AM INNOCENT!"

Another day dawned, and another guard paced in the corridor. It was his first day there, and he labored under the impression that the major was not only a traitor but a scoundrel in general.

Therefore, he looked with sullen dissatisfaction as the jailer appeared escorting a young lady, but his likes and dislikes were of no consequence; the young lady was admitted to the prisoner's room, and then the door clanged, the key grated and the guard paced on as before.

But Major Spencer had arisen, and with outstretched hands he advanced to meet the girl.

"Barbara!"

"Walter!"

"I felt sure you would come."

"Then you had not forgotten it was at this hour I promised to visit you?"

"Forgotten! It has not been from my mind a moment since you left me. In fact, it is all I have to console me."

The prisoner sighed as he led her to a seat.

"I hope you have not lost confidence, Walter."

"Confidence I do not possess; hope I still retain. How can I do otherwise than hope when I remembered that I am here as an innocent man?"

"I feel sure your innocence will yet be established."

"I hope it may. I trust that I am not such a coward that I cannot die bravely, if die I must, but I have many things for which I wish to live. I am young, and, since the Union I love so well is in peril, I long to be among the brave fellows who are fighting for the old flag. The country which has existed undivided for four-score years must still exist undivided, and every loyal son should do his share. May Providence grant that the work may be well done and the Union preserved?"

The major stood erect, and his voice rolled out sonorously, a deeper color crept to his cheeks and a deeper fire to his eyes.

"I know you are loyal," replied Barbara, admiringly.

"No one loves the Union better than I, and what man can do to help the cause of the North I am ready to do. There are charges ugainst me, but they are vile slanders—I solemnly declare I am innocent."

"I know it, I know it, Walter."

"But, Barbara, I had commenced to tell why I wished to live longer. I purposely saved the greatest reason for the last. It's because I know you, Barbara; because I feel that life with you would be a paradise."

He bent over her and touched his lips to hers, looking like a hero of the olden time; but this is a private matter, on which we will not intrude.

Barbara's time was limited, and as the specified hour drew near its end, the major spoke more earnestly.

"I have one hope which I did not have yesterday at this time. Yesterday I saw a man who, I am sure, is at the bottom of all my troubles. It was my old foe, Robert Bridewell."

"Bridewell?"

"Yes. You remember the name, do you not? I spoke of him even as long ago as that first night after Bull Run, when your heroism saved my life. I have spoken of him since. He was, and is, my enemy. I pointed him out at the trial, declared that he was Bridewell, and though he gave a false name, the examination was adjourned and General Wisely promised to investigate the case. Of course, Bridewell is at the bottom of the whole vile plot against me, and I expect to see him exposed."

"What false name did he give?"

"It was—what—ah! I have it. Thorbert, John Thorbert. He had to have some *alias*, you know."

"Describe him," sai l Barbara, with increasing interest.

"He was about my own age, but considerably lighter in weight; has light brown, almost flaxen hair, blue eyes and a fair skin. He is of rather gentlemanly manners, outwardly, for he comes of a good old Virginia family, but he is a demon at heart."

"And this is Robert Bridewell?"

"Yes. Do you think you know him?" and Spencer smiled.

"No, but I am going to search for him."

"Bravo, my fair detective. If you catch the fellow, come to me for a reward. Seriously, Blackstone, my lawyer, is sure to sift him fine."

Fifteen minutes later Barbara left the prison, but she did not go at once to her quarters.

The major little knew all the hopes and new ideas he had raised in her mind, but she was not one to forget easily, and she remembered Glendora's story of the man she had met on Pennsylvania avenue and accosted as Walter Spencer.

This man had given the name of John Thorbert, and had also given his address to Glendora, telling her that if she would call he would satisfy her he was not the man for whom she mistook him. She had left the house to make this visit just as Barbara started for the prison.

Now, the major declared that John Thorbert was Robert Bridewell, and Barbara had at once formed a resolution. She would herself visit Thorbert and see if any good would come of it.

So she called a cab and was driven away, revolving the perplexing features of the case in her mind.

Leaving the assertions of the authorities out of the case, they were as follows:

Glendora declared that Major Spencer was Robert Bridewell.

Glendora declared that Thorbert was Spencer.

The major declared that Thorbert was Bridewell.

Thorbert denied that he was either Spencer or Bridewell.

The major denied that he was Bridewell.

Beset by such strange evidence it is no wonder Barbara was very much confused, but we need scarcely say she took the ground that the major was right, and wholly right, and that every one else was wrong, and that there was a gigantic plot against the man that she loved.

She felt ready to stake her life on his loyalty.

When she reached Thorbert's address, which she luckily remembered, she had to wait only a few moment's before being shown into his presence.

The man from Libby was apparently alone, and he arose and stood politely waiting for her to speak.

Having gone through the ceremony of asking if she had found the right man—which was quite necessary, with the blue eyes and light hair before her—Barbara came to business.

"My name, sir, is Barbara Deane," she said, with a mixture of natural modesty and unnatural aggressiveness.

Thorbert bowed.

"I am bethrothed of Major Walter Spencer," she resolutely continued.

Thorbert looked a little surprised, but bowed again.

"Perhaps you know him, sir."

"I am aware," said the man from Libby, slowly, and with an accent of pity, "that there is a man now held prisoner by our authorities who claims to be Walter Spencer. His rank is that of a major."

"'Claims' to be Walter Spencer?"

"Such were my words, Miss Deane."

"Is he not Walter Spencer?"

"I am compelled to say he is not."

"How dare you make that statement?" cried Barbara, her eyes flashing. "Do you suppose I do not know you, sir? You are Robert Bridewell, the bitter enemy of Walter Spencer, and it is to you he owes all his troubles. You hate him, and you are resolved to ruin—to murder him!"

The severity of her words made no impression on John Thorbert; his own expression was still grave and pitying.

"For your sake, I wish it were so, but it is not. I say to you with all candor that the accused major is not Walter Spencer—more, that he is an unprincipled man who is doubtless guilty of all that is charged against him. He is a Southerner; he went into the rebel army when the war began; and though there is an unfilled space in his record, it seems that he only left the rebels to come North and work for them as a spy. It grieves me deeply to say this, Miss Deane, but the sooner you know the truth, the better it will be for you. He is not worthy of you—believe me, he is not."

Barbara fell on her knees at the speaker's feet.

"Oh, Mr. Bridewell, have pity on me!" she moaned. "I love him—he is my betrothed husband—and I know he is noble and innocent. Sir, you must have had some one in your life whom you loved, and I ask you in the name of that love to have mercy. I know that you and Walter Spencer were enemies in the past, but I beg that you will forget enmity now. Pity me, sir; pity me, and save him."

Thorbert was visibly affected, and he lifted her gently and led her to a seat.

"Listen to me, Miss Deane," he said, earnestly, "for I swear that what I say is true. You speak as though I had some part in bringing the major into his present trouble. I had no part in it, for I have been two years a helpless captive in Libby Prison, and only left there three weeks ago. With two comrads I escaped and managed to reach the Union lines. I can, if you doubt my word, produce these men and prove all I say. More than that, President Lincoln will assure you I am not Robert Bridewell. My name is John Thorbert."

He paused, but she only looked at him with a sort of dumb pain, and he continued:

"As for the major, I sincerely believe he is not worthy of you, and I can swear he is not Walter Spencer. That unhappy man was my fellow prisoner in Libby, and there he died. I knew him well, seeing him every day, and I know the truth of what I say. Walter Spencer is dead!"

Still no answer.

"Speaking solely for your own good, I advise you to look the stern facts in the face. All I know of them is what General Wisely told me, but he says the proof against the major is overwhelming. The case is a mysterious one, for, in the field, the major has done heroic work for the Union. His part at Gettysburg would have advanced him in rank only for the case against him——"

"If he is a traitor, why did he return to prison after he escaped at Gettysburg? He might have joined Lee's army then, but he returned to prison and ordered the negligent guards to again lock him in. Would a guilty man have done this?"

"It does seem remarkable, but he may have thought his valor during the charge would serve to establish his innocence."

"But he was the same as condemned then. Would you have returned to the prison under such circumstances?"

"I believe I should not, but his whole course is an enigma. Even General Wisely acknowledges it is the most mysterious case he ever had to deal with in the army."

Torbert's manner was grave and kind, and Barbara could not help feeling that he felt sympathy for her. But this did not satisfy her. She needed sympathy less than the major needed practical help, and she remained for some time longer, trying to find a grain of hope.

But she went away hopeless. Whatever John Thorbert knew he did not seem inclined to make public, and he asserted that he knew nothing that could help her or him.

So she left him at last, with another hope crushed, and sought her room to turn over in her mind all these strange circumstances and try to see the way clear to help the major.

CHAPTER XVIII.

KIDNAPED.

John Thorbert seemed to have a good deal of business to transact in Washington. When the fugitives first arrived there, O'Brien and Peters had applied for furloughs of thirty days each, preparatory to again entering the army, but Thorbert quickly "shook" them, to use a slang expression, and went his way in the capital.

He had written a letter which he delivered to a person named by the Confederate civilian who had figured in the bogus escape, and this letter had long since started on a journey to the Confederate capital.

Thorbert made no talk with the people he casually met concerning his escape from Libby—indeed, he told very few that he was ever there—and to none of them did he state that his name was Bridewell; but he saw many men and women secretly, and if a detective had been on his track, without any clew to his movements, he must soon have come to the conclusion that the man from Libby was a suspicious person, to say the least.

The evening after the interview last recorded Mr. Thorbert decided to keep his own room. He had been abroad so much that he felt tired out, and rest was necessary. So he sat down in peace and quiet to read the papers of the day.

At about nine o'clock a close carriage drove slowly along the street where lived Mr. Thorbert, and finally stopped a few doors from that particular house. Washington, even to the present day, is not celebrated for a superabundance of light in its minor streets, and as the one on which John Thorbert lived was rather an insignificant one, only those familiar with it ventured to tread at night with any great degree of confidence.

The carriage, pulling up by the curb, presented only a dark bulk, without encountering light to betray its minor details.

Having gained this position, two men emerged from the interior, walked to the third house and pulled the bell.

Three minutes afterward Thorbert was informed that a gentleman at the door wished to see him.

He went down in his slippers, giving the night summons so little thought that his

mind still dwelt on an editorial he had been reading, and its elephantine tread obscured everything else.

He opened the door.

Only one man was visible, and as he stood well back, and his voice was low, and the night was warm, John Thorbert stepped over the threshold to hear his business, which was begun with more ceremony than directness.

As he did so, the second man, who had been hiding in the shadow, swung one hand up and down, and Thorbert dropped to the stone step from the stunning force of a tremendous blow.

He was hardly down before both men had hold of him; he was lifted and borne down the steps and along the sidewalk. There was little danger of detection, for the darkness hid their movements well, and the footsteps of no pedestrian sounded to indicate the approach of those who would interfere.

Still, the strangers moved quickly, and in a very brief time Thorbert was carried to the carriage and deposited inside. Then the other men hastily entered, the door slammed, the driver touched his horse and the mysterious train rolled away.

There were now four men, all told, in the carriage, and three of them busied themselves in tying Thorbert's hands and binding a scarf around his mouth. This done, he would be as incapable of crying aloud when his senses returned as he was at present, and they settled back on the seats with an air of relief.

"That's done," said one.

"A part of it, you mean."

"The rest is easy enough."

"Unless Babson runs away with our boat."

"No fear of that."

"Are you sure he'll sink in the water?"

"Why not?"

"The Potomac is such a high-colored stream that I always had an idea that a common man could walk over it dry-shod."

"Let us drop you in with a fifty pound stone around your waist and see then," suggested the third man.

"Oh! I don't care to experiment."

"Like most scientists, you prefer to see your theories tested on some one else, I reckon."

"That's about the size of it."

"Well, we have our subject here," and he touched Thorbert with his foot.

This conversation sounded decidedly suspicious, and if the man from Libby had heard it he might well be excused for feeling something akin to dismay. But he heard nothing. The blow he had received, while not likely to do him lasting and direct injury, was enough to make him for the time totally oblivious.

The course of the carriage was southeast, and it rolled along at a good rate of speed—as fast, in fact, as was deemed prudent. Attention must not be attracted by too rapid driving.

By and by Thorbert stirred. He felt confused, and tried to raise his hands to his head.

Useless attempt; he found them bound.

There was also a pressure around his mouth. What did it mean? He stirred his feet, and they touched another pair of feet.

"Easy, my bird of Paradise," said one of the strangers. "You will be so good as to keep your gunboats away from my shins."

Thorbert tried to answer, but could not. Where was he? Who were his companions? He heard the roll of the carriage wheels, but did not remember going on any journey.

Then the main facts of the case rushed upon him. He had caught a glimpse of the man who struck him down, just as the blow was delivered, and he realized that he had fallen into hostile hands.

"Kidnaped!"

So much he thought, but, beyond that, all was vague and uncertain. Who had him, and why had they seized him? Like an answer came the recollection of Major Spencer and Barbara Deane. They insisted on believing him the chief enemy of the former. They declared he was a personator of innocence. The whole then seemed clear. To prevent him from giving adverse testimony, he was to be put out of the way, either for the time or forever.

The thought brought some bitterness beyond the ordinary rule. He had sympathized with Barbara, and tried to not only open her eyes to the facts concerning the major, but to show his sympathy and hope for her future happiness.

But he had lived long enough to know that the best efforts often go for nothing, and he faced his peril as calmly as possible.

Could he escape? He tried the bonds around his wrists. They held firm. He moved his jaws, hoping to disarrange the scarf so that he could call for help. Again he was unsuccessful. He tried to speak. The scarf prevented it.

No, he could do nothing at that juncture. He must wait patiently, and, if any chance was given him, move when that chance was afforded.

As soon as he became conscious, his captors relapsed into silence. The carriage rolled on its course as before, and gradually approached the Potomac.

At that point the real city closes. Only a few scattered houses appeared by the way, and the street is practically only a road leading to the cemetery beyond. Just before the cemetery is reached, there is a vacant field. When the carriage reached this field, it turned from the road and drove on toward the river.

At this point the Potomac is broad and sluggish. Its discolored waters might almost be thought motionless, but it is wide enough and the sheet is a gigantic arm of the whole body.

When the carriage paused it was near the water. One of the men left the carriage, walked to the bank and then returned. The prisoner was lifted out and borne away.

The night was decidedly dark, and the place was not familiar enough for him to locate it, but the loneliness of the situation impressed him strongly. He was carried to the water's edge, and then real fear—what man is too brave to be without fear?—assailed him.

He tried again to speak—to burst his bonds. Vain attempt! They seemed incapable of being broken by a giant.

By the bank was a boat, which had a single occupant; a tall, bony man who, grasping his oars, sat passively on a seat.

"Drop him in the stream," he tersely said.

"Yes, give him a view of the best scenery," was the reply, accompanied with an unfeeling laugh.

"Thar's piles on't, on this water."

"Are you in good rowing trim, Babson?"

"A 1," was the terse reply.

"For I like a good skipper."

"Thar be two kinds o' skippers. I may be one, but I reckon our cargo thar will soon be a skipper hisself."

The man laughed coarsely, and the others joined in. John Thorbert shivered. Everything had an omnious cast. Why had he been taken to this lonely place? What was the object of the men? What did Babson's vogue words imply?

The naturally-suggested answer was not a comforting one.

Babson dipped his oars and pulled lustily out into the water. A gentle breeze came down over the sluggish surface and certainly seemed out of keeping with the deed about to be done.

Then the big boatman ceased rowing and raised his oars.

"This'll do," he said.

"Where's the rope?" asked another man.

"Here."

They began tying something about Thorbert's waist, and the whole horrible truth flashed upon him. He was to be cast overboard and sunk in the water.

Again he tried furiously to break his bonds—to move the scarf—to speak. Uselessly. He had the use only of his legs, and when he began to flounder about with them one of the kidnapers cruelly sat down upon them.

The prisoner was helpless.

The rope, to which a heavy rock was attached, was soon tied securely around his waist, and then all the men gave a hand at lifting him and the weight which was destined to bear him to the bottom of the water and keep him there.

What thoughts flashed through his mind we need not say, but he believed he was on the brink of eternity.

"Now, then," said Babson, "give the word."

"One, two, three!"

At the last word their burden was cast several feet from the boat. There was a sullen splash, and then the dark waters closed over their victim. He disappeared, a few bubbles rolled up—their work was done.

"Back to the shore!"

Babson again took the oars and pulled away.

"It was well done, right well done," he said. "One sneak is outer ther way. Who he was I s'pose you know, but I don't care. It ain't any o' my biz."

"You're a philosopher, Bart."

"Mebbe I am, I dunno. Fangrate, I'v sarved you well an' 'arned my pay."

Babson released one oar to take the money and then drove the boat on. They touched the shore, the strangers stepped to land and then entering their carriage, drove away.

They had gone but a few yards when Babson, again dipping his oars, sent the boat spinning back over the water. He pulled as though a life was at stake, but as he pulled eagerly watched the surface of the water.

"Here, Bob."

The words seemed to rise from the water, and he instantly pulled in that direction. He saw a dark object on the surface, and was beside it in a very short time.

"Quick, take him in!"

Babson bent, grasped a heavy object and pulled it on board. A second object followed, and he had two men with him. The last one sank beside the first on the boat's bottom.

"Look to him," he said, "I'm all right."

The boatman bent over the first object. He cast off, first of all, a heavy scaff. Next, he cut the ropes which held the wrists of a senseless man.

"Is he gone?" asked the previous speaker.

"No sign of life now, but we'll bring him around. Did you have much trouble with him?"

"Not at first. I had cut away the rock almost before he touched bottom, but I then lost my knife and could not free his hands. He is heavier than I thought, and it was a severe tax on my strength. But I am recovering now."

He partially arose, and both bent over John Thorbert, thus strangely saved from the water. The latter was still unconscious, but they felt no fear. They knew he had not taken in enough water to do him damage, and it was not likely he had sustained any degree of shock from which he would not recover.

Babson was an old hand at rough-and-ready doctoring, and he set to work with such a will that in a short time Thorbert gave signs of returning consciousness.

This done, the boatman pulled to the shore, which he had just reached when the rescued man suddenly made an effort to sit erect. Number three assisted him, and he sat looking about in considerable confusion.

"It's all right," said Babson. "Them chaps would have drowned you, but we hev pulled ye through. All right, all right. Don't think because I rowed ye out afore your bath that I was ag'in ye. My chum was a-hangin' onter ther stern o' ther craft, an' when ye went down, he went down, too, an' pulled ye out. Them chaps hired me ter help kill ye, but it wa'n't in my tender heart ter do it."

Thorbert's energies were beginning to return.

"Who were they?" he asked.

"Don't know, but I've proved myself an honest man."

"I'll not forget it," said John, earnestly. "My life is valuable to me, if not to any one else, and I will prove that I know how to appreciate a good turn."

"That's fair, an' I won't refuse a few nice greenbacks. 'Twon't cost ye nothin' either, fur me to say that you had better keep an eye open fur them chaps, whoever they was."

Thorbert did not answer at once, but he was thinking:

"Who were they? Miss Barbara Deane seemed week enough, but her lover, the major, seems capable of all things. Do I owe my ducking to them?"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MAJOR'S FRIENDS.

Liquids that cheer and inebriate have an attraction for a good many men. When the wine is in, the wit is out, says an old proverb, but if the world was packed full of such wise saws, it would have no effect on its people.

Liquor is a lodestone, which attract those with a certain kind of palate, let their life-station be what it may. Therefore, butchers, bakers, candle-stick-makers, lawyers, doctors, warriors and kings drink and are merry.

Such being the case, it is not strange that on a certain day a little man in a blue army suit entered a certain liquor store in Washington and proceeded to be merry himself. It was, in fact, a variety theater at the rear, established by army officers, and, while the general public knew not of it, the police

knew that there the boys in blue sought relaxation from their arduous and dangerous work.

The little man—he was little for a soldier—found a table and sat down.

It was not a regular theater. In fact, it was quite irregular. Circular tables were scattered about, the movable chairs all faced the tables, and, as a rule, the patrons gave more attention to drinking, smoking and talking than to affairs on the stage.

Our friend, the soldier, sat down at a table which had no other occupant, and, securing a drink, began to smoke and look idly around. Then another man sat down beside him.

"Fine day," said the stranger.

"Yes, sir."

The soldier was polite, for the stranger was well dressed.

"Good weather for fighting."

"Yes, sir."

"I hear the army is going to make a big push soon, and it wouldn't surprise me to see you lads walk into Richmond."

"Zounds! that would be fun."

"And glory for the Army of the Potomac."

"Ay, that's so."

"It's coming," and the stranger nodded and winked knowingly.

The soldier looked at him with renewed respect. Clearly, the stranger must be some great civil officer; perhaps a member of the Cabinet. He looked a trifle like the dignified Stanton; possibly it was he.

The soldier grew even more respectful.

"How do you like soldiering?" asked the stranger.

The man in blue hesitated. He did not like it, but, after the opinion he had formed of his companion, it seemed injudicious to confess the fact.

Before he had his answer ready, the stranger laughed.

"Just like me; we don't like it. Too much trouble and work for the money. So I'm ou of it—I have plenty of money."

"W.sh I had," confessed the soldier.

"Wish you had, my good fellow; yet money isn't all. As I said, I have money enough, yet I have a friend in trouble. You may know him—Major Walter Spencer."

The soldier brightened.

"Why, certainly I do; I walk guard outside his cell-door every night. Certainly I do!"

"What, are you Ditmar?"

"Yes, sir."

"Give me your hand, Mr. Ditmar. Now, then, this is a pleasant surprise. The major has often spoken of you. 'Good fellow, who ought not to be in such a humble sphere,' said the major to me of you."

"Did the major say that?"

"He did, and Ditmar, I believe he will give you a present of five or ten dollars when he is hanged."

The idea of Spencer being hanged so unnerved the soldier that he poured his liquor down his throat hurriedly. The stranger insisted on filling his glass.

"It's too bad," said Ditmar.

"Bad! Sir, I'd give five thousand dollars to see the major out of prison and safely on his way South. Now, if I was the guard, like you are, I would of course leave his door open and let the good fellow walk out. But I am not the guard."

"I—am—the—guard!"

Ditmar spoke very slowly. He did not do this to make his remark emphatic, but because he was thinking so deeply that he really did not know he spoke at all.

"Yes, you are the guard, and I would give you five thousand dollars to let the major free, if you'd do it."

Ditmar started. The idea was at once fascinating and revolting. For five thousand he had a profound respect and love; for a halter he had none. It seemed that he might win the one, but by winning it, would he not get the other. He turned his troubled gaze on the calm face of the stranger. The orchestra had struck up a wailing paroxysm of music; some performer was breaking the record, but neither of the men heard or saw.

"Five thousand dollars?" questioned Ditmar."

"Five thousand dollars!" replied the stranger.

It was a hard temptation for a poor man. Ditmar thought Major Spencer noble and generous; he believed him innocent of the charges against him, and he remembered that the five thousand dollars would clear the old homestead of debts and make the future of his wife and children, and his old father and mother, very different from their present hard lot. How many other men in a hundred would have wavered then?

The stranger saw the point he had gained and went on. He did not tell Ditmar that he had purposely sought this interview, and had been seeking it for several days, but he came to the point with the skill of a diplomatist, and, in brief, wound the poor soldier around his finger.

Surely there could be no actual sin in freeing a man who was wrongfully accused, while, as for the danger to himself, the stranger had a plan all arranged which seemed to promise success.

And so Ditmar listened to temptation and yielded. He agreed to aid in the escape of the mysterious major. As for the other parties at the prison, the stranger declared he could fix it with them. Details were arranged, and then the stranger went away.

Ditmar was left alone, but he was not in a condition to direct his gaze to the stage and laugh, as those other free-and-easy fellows were doing. Now he felt nervous and uneasy. He had done a treasonable thing and agreed to do a still more treasonable one, and his conscience smote him. He really loved his country as well as the average man; but he also loved the parents, the wife and the children on the old homestead.

Yes, and for their sakes he would risk all.

Night again."

Ditmar paced along the corridor, but his heart was heavier than the musket he bore before his breast. Whenever he passed the cell of Major Spencer he felt a strange thrill, a terrible uneasiness, and more than once he thought:

"I hope they will not come."

The hours passed on, until the clock struck two. Ditmar started. It was the set time, and before three he might be a traitor and a criminal. Ay, whether the mysterious major was innocent of guilty, he, the soldier, had no right to give him his liberty. But his promise had been given, a good deal of money awaited him, and he had gone too far to refuse it.

"I hope they will not come."

For the hundredth time his mind framed the words, and then the door at the end of the corridor opened and half a dozen men entered. All were masked, and by that sign he knew them. They had come to perform their part in the work of the night.

The guard stood like a statue unable to stir, while one of the masked men advanced and made a reassuring sign.

"It's all right, Ditmar," said he, in the well remembered voice of the man who had bought the soldier's honor.

Ditmar felt like shooting him, but it was too late.

"He's there," he said, pointing to the door of the major's cell.

"And here are the keys with which we shall enter. You see we have persuaded the jailer. By the way, I nearly forgot your money. Here it is—five hundred dollars."

"Five hundred dollars!" echoed Ditmar.

"Yes."

"It was to be five thousand."

"We have changed our minds, and think five hundred enough for your service. What! are you dissatisfied?"

"Yes—no. That is—— A bargain is a bargain, and you promised me five thousand."

"My good man," said the stranger, sharply, "be satisfied if you get five hundred. At this stage of affairs we could easily cheat you out of the whole, but we are generous. Easy enough it would be to shoot you, or suppose we should say, 'Give the alarm if you dare?' Would you dare, Ditmar?"

The soldier felt the force of this logic, and his fingers closed yet more tightly over the money he had already got. It was not much, but better than nothing. But he wished more than ever that he had never taken part in the work.

The masked leader turned to the door and fitted a key. It was the wrong one. He tried another. It succeeded as poorly, and so did each one he tried on the big ring. He grew impatient as he went on, and Ditmar grew nervous. Why did not the wretches finish their work and go? What if they should be discovered? He leaned on his musket and trembled perceptibly.

"What if they were discovered?

The masked leader uttered an oath.

"The key is not here," he exclaimed. "Ditmar, isn't it usually kept on this ring?"

"Yes."

"Then that jailor managed to conceal it. I will have it, or have his life."

He hurried from the corridor, and Ditmar trembled more than ever. He had been promised that there should be no bloodshed, and now that the stranger had got inside the place he seemed inclined to run matters to suit himself. Whether he had bribed the jailor in order to get in, or had forced an entrance, Ditmar did not know, but he could already see that matters were assuming a dark aspect.

One of the other masked men had noticed the slide near the major's cell-door, and he walked to the place and opened it.

"Hallo!" he said, in a cautious tone, "Hallo!"

"Well, what is it?"

"We are here—friends."

"Who are you?"

"Secret agents of the South."

Ditmar shook anew. So they were not personal friends of Spencer, as they had claimed, but genuine Confederates!

"What rubbish are you talking?" curtly asked the major.

"I mean what I say, Major Bridewell, and, to prove it, let me add that we are here to rescue you. We have managed to enter and take possession of the prison, and as soon as we get the key of your room we will release you. Outside we have a carriage waiting, our way of escape is carefully marked out, and in an hour we will have you outside of Washington and on your way South. The Confederacy does not forget her faithful servants, and we will rescue you or die in the attempt."

"Sir," replied the major, at once, "if you are in earnest, it seems that you are laboring under the same mistake made by other people. You call me Bridewell; that is not my name. You insinuate that I am a rebel. Sir, I thank Heaven that I am not a traitor, but a loyal man. As for the key of which you speak, you need not trouble yourself to find it. I shall not leave my cell if you throw open a door as wide as the White House!"

This declaration, made in a ringing voice, seemed to stagger the masked man.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, "you cannot be in earnest."

"I am in earnest, sir."

"And you decline to leave your cell?"

"I do."

"Will you remain and be hung?"

"If my country is so blind as to believe me a traitor, I accept her decision and the punishment she may allot me. I, sir, am a loyal man. I love the Union, and I will die loving it. I refuse to be rescued, as you call it. You had better go away at once. Your proposal is an insult to me."

"Major, do you doubt my sincerity?"

"No, but you doubt mine. The whole world seems determined to make me out a traitor. I refuse to be one. Let that settle the whole matter!"

The masked man turned to his companions.

"He is mad!" was his exclamation.

"You will find there is method in my madness," was the cool reply from the cell. "I decline to be made a rebel. Take that for an answer, and keep out of my cell. If any man enters here and proclaims himself a Confederate, I will do my best to break his head for him!"

This sturdy warning gave the secret agent fresh dismay, and he looked helplessly at his companions, but, as he did so, the leader of the party re-entered. He came not bearing the key, but with hot haste and perceptible alarm.

"Quick! save yourselves!" he exclaimed. "We are discovered—betrayed—lost! There is no time to loose. Each for himself—away!"

Too late! There was a clatter at the door, and, looking in that direction, they saw blue uniforms and gleaming muskets.

The masked leader seized the lamp and dashed it to the floor. The room was plunged into darkness. Then came a shout, several shots, a groan, a fall—a shower of lead had swept through the narrow place.

Ditmar fell, his musket clattering to the floor. He was not touched, but his heart was broken. Discovery meant ruin, disgrace and death for him, and as he thought of his wife and children he wished he were already dead.

As he fell his hand encountered a revolver, which had fallen from the hand of a dead spy. The touch gave him a desperate idea, and with the shouts of the other men ringing in his ears he clutched the weapon, drew back the hammer and placed it to his head.

"Rebecca—Arthur—Millie!" he gasped, "farewell!"

He pulled the trigger and sank bleeding to the floor, unconscious of the fighting, shouting men around him. He had erred

in a grave particular of his life, and to him judgment had come swiftly, and by his own hand. He, for whom the far away loved ones were praying, had adoped the suicide's desperate resort.

CHAPTER XX.

ON TRIAL FOR HIS LIFE.

Washington had a sensation. A bold attempt, and one which nearly succeeded, had been made by rebel agents to rescue the infamous spy and traitor, who called himself Major Spencer, from his cell in the prison.

The keeper of the jail had been obliged to yield to numbers, but, hiding the key, he had delayed the secret agents until the Union men arrived, and so frustrated their scheme.

The other hero was Private George Washington Ditmar—all the papers printed the name in big capitals—who had fought the enemy single handed until he fell, fainting from loss of blood from a wound in his head, inflicted by one of the secessionists. The "gallant fellow," the papers added, was then lying in the hospital, insensible, but there was reason to believe he would fully recover.

He was also said to be a "brave, loyal, modest man, with a frugal turn of mind, and on his person was found five hundred dollars, which it was supposed he intended to send home to his wife the following day."

"We take the liberty of suggesting," said another paper, "that this brave soldier, who heroically fought the enemy alone, be made a lieutenant, or captain, when he recovers."

Rest on, G. W. Ditmar, this world is not all a dreary show!

But the phials of everybody's wrath were poured on the head of the major. People searched the dictionaries for adjectives severe enough to describe him. They forgot to abuse those who had broken into the jail to get him out, in their zeal to abuse him, who, had they but known it, had refused to accompany the breakers—and their was a clamor for his immediate trial.

Government was ready with its case; the mysterious major was to be tried at once. President Lincoln had had an interview with Mr. Blackstone, the accuser's counsel, and convinced that man that John Thorbert was not what the prisoner claimed he was.

Just what the president had said, Blackstone declined to state.

But the major was to be tried at last.

John Thorbert did not go near the place of trial. His sympathies had been strongly aroused for Barbara Deane, and he did not care to see her lover suffer. Besides, John was attending to a case of his own. He had nearly lost his life in the river, as before related, and he had men on the track who were looking up the perpetrators of the deed.

One detective thus engaged was a white-haired, long-bearded old man, with a benevolent countenance, but very keen eyes. Oddly enough, this old man called at the hospital that morning to see Ditmar, but went away when informed that he was unconscious.

Thorbert had given a sum of money to Burt Babson to reward him for his honesty in the river adventure. It was a somewhat singular circumstance that Babson, who appeared on the field of Bull Run as the wilful would-be assassin of one of our principal characters, should, two years later, save another from death.

Babson, badly wounded at Bull Run, had finally recovered, got into some trouble and been severely punished by his officers. Then he deserted, came to Washington, and there lived an uncertain and never-too-honest life.

The case of Major Spencer came up in due time.

But the prosecution dealt the defence sledge-hammer blows. Unless a good deal of "tall swearing" was done, it was clearly proven that he who called himself Walter Spencer was really Robert Bridewell.

By the end of the second day all the evidence was in, and the major was given a chance to speak for himself.

He arose, tall, manly, bold and fearless, yet with a kind of refined dignity which strongly impressed all, and looked slowly along the line of faces of those who were his judges. Then he spoke in a strong, clear, but withal, modest manner:

"Gentlemen," he said, "I am on trial for my life. Such a fact would make a guilty man eloquent, but, for my own part, I have little to say, and that in the simplest words. I am at a loss to account for the evidence which has been presented. If I had not been confronted with it for several weeks, I should now believe myself dreaming. I am accused of being one Robert Bridewell. I emphatically deny that such is my name. I am Walter Spencer, and have been all my life. Yet, men whom I have known come forward and swear that I am not Spencer, but Bridewell.

"As for my connection with the present war, I have always been on the side of the Union. I have loved my country, and fought for its honor and maintainance to the best of my ability. I deny writing the letter to Robert Lee introduced here as evidence. The writing is fatally like my own, but it is a forgery. I never wrote to Lee in my life. Now, and always, I have been a loyal man. In my humble way I have worked earnestly for the Union, and I hope and pray that the grand cause may triumph in the end, whether I live to see that consummation or not.

"I cannot blame the members of this tribunal if they regard me as guilty. I am accused, and I cannot explain away the evidence. I can only believe that I have made myself obnoxious to certain persons, and that they are resolved to put me out of the way. Gentlemen, I am in the web of a vile conspiracy, and I see men whom I have regarded as my friends, arrayed against me. Why it is so I do not know.

"In defense I can only point to my record. I have been with the Army of the Potomac all the way from Bull Run to the present time. I have worked under the eyes of such generals as McClellan, Burnside, Hooker, Meade and Warfield, and all have certified to my outward devotion. You are not asked to believe I was secretly a traitor and a spy. I can only ask you to consider my record and base your judgment upon it, and, in conclusion, to hear me when I swear that I, Walter Spencer, have never committed a hostile act against that grand Union which I love so well!"

He had raised his right hand toward Heaven at the last words, and, though he did not raise his voice above the quiet tone he had used from the first, there was a solemnity about it which deeply impressed them all.

He then sat down, and for a moment there was silence, but a well-known general voiced the sentiment of all when he turned to a comrade and said, in a low voice:

"If this man is a traitor, where shall we look for our patriots."

It was then too late in the day to conclude the trial, so it was adjourned until the following morning, when the argument of Mr. Blackstone would be heard and the case concluded.

The major was returned to his cell.

The next day the court reassembled at the usual hour. Mr. Blackstone was the most noticable figure.

It was noticed that Major Spencer did not look as well as usual. His gaze met that of every one else steadily, but there were dark circles about his eyes and a haggard expression on his face. It was generally remarked that he must have slept poorly, and the prison guard could have told that the major awoke at four o'clock and had passed the remainder of the night in pacing his room.

But the major was as calm as ever in the court.

"The evidence is now all in," said the presiding officer, when he had taken his seat, "and we will proceed with the arguments. Mr. Blackstone, we are ready for you."

The learned counselor opened with eloquence which thirsted for utterance and began to rise slowly, but the major was ahead of him. That mysterious person arose and faced the tribunal.

"Gentlemen," he said, in a clear, steady voice, "I have been impartially tried, and I am now ready to have your verdict without the tedious interjection of speeches——"

Mr. Blackstone, his brow darkened by a miniature thunder-cloud, began to arise again, but the presiding officer motioned him back.

"Gentlemen," resumed the major, steadily, "it seems to me a farce to go further, and I am ready to abide by your verdict. If it's against me, as it undoubtedly will be, I propose to show you how a Southerner can meet his fate. I, sirs, am a descendent of a proud old Virginia family, and I will show those who know me that it is not as a craven that Robert Rhett Bridewell dies!"

The last words rang out pompously, but all the hearers sat for a moment dazed.

"Bridewell!" finally repeated the presiding officer, in a wondering voice. "Do you at last admit that such is your true name?"

"I have never denied it, sir," was the haughty reply. "I am Robert Bridewell, a Virginian, a Southerner, a deadly enemy of the tyranical North and a firm supporter of the just causes of the South. Yes, sir, our cause is just. You may call us rebels if you will, but we glory in the fact that we have thrown off the yoke of tyranny the North would have put upon us!"

Utter silence reigned in the room as he finished. All were astonished, dumbfounded, and Blackstone looked like a dying man. Where now were his hopes of fame and glory?

Even the gray-headed generals were amazed. They had known of confessions by convicted men before then, but never before had they known a man to confess just as his lawyer, a good one, was about to make his decisive plea. The strange new departure of the mysterious major utterly put to flight all their theories and opinions, and no one ventured to say a word.

"Is this a company of mutes?" sarcastically demaded the prisoner.

Before he could be answered there was a stir at the rear of the room and several people passed out, carrying a lady who appeared to have fainted. As they went, those who knew her and saw her face, recognized Barbara Deane.

Then Glendora Marchmont came impatiently forward and confronted the major.

"Robert Bridewell—villain!—behold your work!" she exclaimed, in a thrilling voice.

An expression of pity was on the major's face.

"It is sad," he answered, gently. "Who was the lady?"

"Did you not see her face? It was Barbara Deane, whom you——"

"I never heard the name before. She is a stranger to me, but you will please say to her when she recovers that I regret having been the indirect cause of her attack."

Glendora looked at him in indignant wonder for a moment, and then swept from the room.

The presiding officer summoned up his dignity.

"Order in the room!" he said, commandingly. "I understand, prisoner, that you confess you are Robert Bridewell?"

"So I do, and so I have always said," was the calm reply.

"Do you confess that you are a secret agent of the Confederacy?"

Blackstone made a feeble effort to prevent a reply, but it came in spite of him.

"You have established the fact—I shall not deny it?

"Who were your accomplices?"

The major opened his lips to answer, but, as he did so, the semi-silence of the court-room was broken by the report of a revolver; the prisoner, throwing his hands up to his head, dropped back in his chair, a red stream trickling down his now pallid face.

CHAPTER XXI.

"A REMARKABLE CASE!"

Such was the headline, in bold letters, of an article which appeared in the *Surgical and Medical Trumpet*, a journal the character of which is indicated by its name, for December 25, 1863.

We give the article entire, with the exception of certain scientific terms which would not be clear to the ordinary reader.

"The existing war has furnished many remarkable cases in surgery, but one of these we believe to be, in one respect, without parallel in science or past fact. Before the war there lived in Virginia two young men, named Robert Bridewell and Walter Spencer. They were neighbors, but never friends, and the breach was widened when Bridewell took the ready money of one Miss Glendora Marchmont and invested it in such a way that it was completely lost. This was the fault of an unscrupulous man named Bredwick, and Bridewell was as sorry as any one for the loss, though both Spencer and Miss Marchmont believed him a party to Bridewell's irregularity.

"When the war-clouds gathered, Bridewell became an ardent secessionist, while Spencer was a strong Union man. Each enlisted where his sympathies were, but, before Spencer went North, he was secretly married to Miss Marchmont. He entered an Indiana regiment, and at the battle of Bull Run was captured by the rebels, and for two years held prisoner in Libby.

"Bridewell fought well for the rebels, but when his superiors asked him to go North as a secret agent, he agreed, and it was decided that he should pretend to desert at

Bull Run. He obtained a Union uniform and put it on, but the retreat of the loyal army prevented him from joining it. So he resolved to discard the blue uniform for a gray one, run the gantlet, as it were, and join the Union army as soon as possible. He made the exchange of uniform, but a wounded rebel soldier, whose name was Babson, believing him to be a genuine Yankee, shot him down. The bullet had hit him in the head, stunning him and pressing the bone of the skull upon the brain.

"The effect of this is well known, and it was not strange that when Bridewell recovered his consciousness his mind was seriously effected. Such cases are common. But now we record the strange, startling and unparalled fact that coming back to life, as we may say, Bridewell imagined that he was not himself, but his enemy, Walter Spencer! In fact, he had in his own mind completely changed identities with another man. Stranger yet, his views on important subjects had radically changed, becoming, not his own, but those entertained by the aforesaid Walter Spencer. In fact, he now hated himself, the real Bridewell, and instead of loving the South, he was an ardent Unionist. He sincerely believed himself to be Spencer, and adopted all of Spencer's views.

"Such a radical metamorphosis of identity is, we believe, without parallel in medical and surgical records. But let us following our subject further.

"Badly wounded as he was, he succeeded in making his way North, entered a hospital, and, on his recovery, re-entered the army as Walter Spencer. Being transferred from his old regiment to General Warfield's staff, no one discovered that he was not what he claimed to be. He was now an ardent Union man, and, by heroic work, finally gained the rank of major.

"But, strange enough, he was not always a Union man, even now. At times he would awake in the middle of the night, and, for the time, be himself—Bridewell, and a strong Confederate. At such times he believed himself to be an agent, a spy of the rebels, and actually was one! During these nocturnal periods of sanity, or whatever they may be called, he dimly remembered his daily life, but believed that, as Spencer, he was acting a fictitious part, and, as Bridewell, he was still a rebel. He actually wrote letters to General Lee at such moments, gave them to a messenger, and thus betrayed the plans of a course which, in his daily hours, he strongly upheld. Thus he was in his night watches acting for the Confederacy just as he had agreed to act before he was shot.

"How is this to be explained? There is but one explanation. When he awoke at night it was simply a waking trance, the equally unconscious but more systematic movement of a somnambulist. He was practically unconscious of what he did, and in the morning was wholly unconscious that anything of the kind had occurred. It seems probable that had he been actually awakened, during one of these semi-somnambulistic turns he would at once have become, not Bridewell, but Spencer; but on going back to bed he returned to natural sleep again, and in the morning awakes as Spencer, the Union major.

"But his double life finally got him into trouble. One of his letters fell into the hands of detectives, who speedily worked up a case against him and he was arrested. Then ensued great perplexity. The major avowed his innocence and his devotion to the Union, and proved the latter by a fresh and heroic deed at Gettysburg. His friends stood by him manfully, and the prosecution were asked how a man could be at once a rebel spy and a heroic Union man.

"Still, he was soon environed by adverse testimony. It was clearly proven that he was not Walter Spencer and that he was Robert Bridewell. This latter fact he stoutly denied, however, and we need scarcely add that he believed all he said. It might almost be added that when awake he was as truly Walter Spencer as though he had been born Spencer, and exaggerating his old mistake in losing Miss Marchmont's money into a crime, he really loathed his real self, Bridewell, and believed that man to be a villain. The last doubt was removed from the mind of President Lincoln, who had become interested in the strange case, when the real Walter Spencer returned North after escaping from Libby. The latter did not avow his identity, but for reasons we are not at liberty to state, went under an assumed name, but the mysterious major saw him and, actually believing what he said, declared that he (Spencer) was Robert Bridewell.

"The major's trial at last came on, and for two day he avowed his innocence. During the night which followed he awoke in one of his strange 'waking trances,' as we will express it, and remembering his trial in an erroneous way, was so troubled that he paced his cell the rest of the night. Had he again gone to sleep he would have awoke as Spencer, but as he did not go to sleep again, he actually went to his trial with his somnambulistic fit still upon him, thinking as Bridewell and knowing himself as Bridewell, and there in court he astonished all by taking a radically new ground and avowing that he was Bridewell, a rebel, and a hater of the North. What more he would have said is uncertain, for a rebel agent who was in the room became alarmed and shot him down in the open court.

"The would-be assassin was arrested and the major taken to the hospital. He had been wounded in almost the same place as on the occasion of his first injury, and then the fact was discovered that a displaced bone touched, and had the usual effect upon the brain. This had not been discovered when he was in the hospital in 1861, nor by the surgeons who examined him in regard to his sanity during the period of his retention in jail. This trouble was remedied, and when he finally recovered the delusions were gone from his mind, and he was himself—Robert Bridewell.

"Certain officials were in favor of putting him again on trial, but President Lincoln, with his usual great goodness, interested himself in the case, and, after long investigation, all the facts here recorded were developed. Convinced that Bridewell was not a responsible person from 1861 to the time he was shot, the President declared that he should not be tried as a spy, but, as the extreme of severity, should be held as an ordinary prisoner.

"Bridewell was touched by this magnanimity, and as he lay on his bed of suffering, he is said to have reviewed his past life and the affairs of the nation critically and conscientiously, and as a result he has declared his abhorrence of secession, and has asked to be allowed to enter the Union army as a private. What answer will be given him we do not know, and we now turn from the ordinary details of this strange case to consider it in a scientific and surgical light."

We need not here record the learned essay which followed, but the journal reiterated its former assertion that, while many cases were on record of men being diseased mentally by such skull wounds, they had never before heard of one where the wounded man, in his delusion, imagined himself to be his enemy and hated his real self.

As a supplement to this revelation, an explanation of certain events in Walter Spencer's career should be given. We found him in Libby Prison in the summer of 1863, and he was released by proving—or seeming to prove—that he was really named Robert Bridewell, and was unjustly imprisoned. His chief witness was General Scholeff.

The facts of the case were as follows:

Spencer had long known Scholeff, and he knew certain facts concerning the man which would have done him great damage with the Confederate officials. With these facts this story has nothing to do, but when Scholeff chanced to enter Libby, Spencer soon convinced him that he was at the prisoner's mercy.

The price of silence was release. And thus it came about that Scholeff went before the authorities and swore as he did. It was the general's idea that Spencer claim to be Bridewell, and the matter had no particular significance.

As we have seen, Scholeff's testimony freed Spencer, but when the former saw that he had deceived the government to such an extent that they were about to trust Spencer in important matters, he resolved that the fugitive should never reach the North alive.

It was he who set the ambuscade where Spencer had been assured he should find horses and secure them without trouble, and it was because Spencer suspected the truth that he exclaimed: "I am betrayed!" when fired upon in the stable.

But Scholeff's plan miscarried, and the fugitives reached Washington in safety.

We have seen Spencer, when he met Glendora—who was really his wife—on Pennsylvania avenue, deny that he knew her, and that he was not Walter Spencer. This was done because he could not trust Gridley, his companion at the time, and he seized the first opportunity of explaining all to his faithful wife. It was because of what she told him concerning the major and Barbara that he showed such pity for the latter, and Glendora was really in the next room when Barbara and "John Thorbert" were talking.

The attempt to drown Spencer, when he was rescued by Burt Babson's double dealing was due to the plots of genuine secret agents of the South who had discovered that he was not what the Confederacy required.

It had been the idea of the Union leaders to make Spencer useful in sending false reports to Richmond, but the expose brought about by his rivals prevented all this.

Spencer then took a month's furlough, which time he spent with his wife, and then re-entered the army in his old regiment.

During the illness of Robert Bridewell, our mysterious major, Barbara was unwearying in her devotion to him. He had really failed to recognized her in the court-room, when in his peculiar "somnambulistic" state—as we call it for want of a better name—but he never wavered after he recovered consciousness in the hospital.

Little by little the lost threads were regained, and investigation showed that the voice heard by him in the wood, when he was fleeing with Barbara and Adam, and which he had declared he recognized, was that of the genuine Spencer, and that the latter was captured immediately after and taken to Libby.

The fact was also established that the loss of Glendora's money, in 1860, was Bredwick's rascality, and not Bridewell's, and she fully exonerated the latter.

The major's case often occupied the attention of President Lincoln, who was sincerely interested, and that noble man was convinced that the scales had fallen from the major's eyes—that he saw clearly at last—that he was then as firm an adherent of the Union as he had been when his mind was clouded.

The combined faith of the President and General Warfield was sufficient to restore Bridewell to his old position on the general's staff, and to the end of the war he served faithfully.

When Private Ditmar recovered he was offered a promotion for his gallant (?) services at the prison, but he had the good sense to decline it. He was filled with horror when he thought of the mischief he had so nearly wrought, and his only ambition was to serve faithfully, and humbly to the end of the war.

This he did, twice declining promotion.

To make his picture a perfect one we ought to be able to add that he threw away, or otherwise declined, the five hundred dollars obtained from the Confederate agent, but truth compels us to say he kept it and cleared off the mortgage on his house.

And when, at the end of the war, he returned to his waiting family, he was a comfortably situated man.

In July, 1865, there was another assembling of wedding guests at Mr. Waters' house, and Robert Bridewell and Barbara were married without an interruption.

Among the guests were Spencer and his wife, Major Jack Hill, General Warfield, Adam and Sambo, and all went merry as a marriage bell.

Bridewell had fought to the end under the Union flag, and no one could then be found bold and false enough to question his loyalty. But he confessed to his wife that if it had not been for her, the result might have been different.

Still, he has never regretted that he fought for the star spangled banner, and he made for himself a name his descendents will always admire and revere.

He and Spencer are no longer enemies. They live side by side, and the two families are happy.

So is Sambo, but he likes to tell secretly of his night ride with Glendora.

[THE END.]

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